

NOTES

STATUS OF THE YELLOW WAGTAIL IN WESTMORLAND.

MACPHERSON in his *Fauna of Lakeland* (p. 112) gives the impression that the Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava rayi*) is distinctly uncommon in the Lake District. He writes: "Ray's Wagtail is a decidedly scarce summer visitant to Lakeland. . . . A few pairs breed sporadically in Cumberland . . . but it never occurs in any numbers, not even on migration."

The fact is that the Yellow Wagtail is far from being a scarce bird in Westmorland, where it is probably more numerous in the nesting season than the more typical Grey Wagtail. However, it must be sought for in certain places only, but in these chosen haunts it will be found fairly frequently. The type of locality favoured by this bird is almost invariably delta-land where the streams enter the lakes, flat marshy fields which are subject to constant flooding during the winter months. On some of these rough swampy fields up to as many as six pairs breed every year, and such land is to be found on almost every lake. A "lake-head" is practically certain to be occupied by one or more pairs while round such a lake as Windermere there are many suitable sites where the birds are present every year.

The average date of arrival in the spring is about 24th April and the birds commence to construct their nests almost immediately after arriving, though the eggs are not usually laid till about the middle of May. As a rule one brood only is raised, but in 1918 one pair that I had under observation certainly had a second nest. The young from the first nest were seen on the wing about the end of June, while on July 7th I watched the old bird busily engaged in building a second nest, which was being lined with white cow's hair. A second nest, however, is unusual.

While the birds are only to be found on the low-lying swampy ground through the summer, it is very noticeable that from about the middle of August to the middle of September they are much more generally distributed, coming freely into fields and even gardens at some little distance from the water. In spite of Macpherson's remark about scarcity on migration, I am inclined to think that there is a considerable autumnal

movement through the district, and that these birds seen towards the end of August are on migration, and are not members of the regular breeding stock. A. ASTLEY.

ON THE BREEDING OF THE LESSER REDPOLL IN GLAMORGANSHIRE.

As a breeding species the Lesser Redpoll (*Carduelis l. cabaret*) is by no means common in southern Glamorganshire, in fact I look upon it as rather scarce, although in winter small parties are constantly to be seen.

On May 14th, 1910, I was fortunate enough to discover a nest practically completed and ready for eggs, in a fork of a small alder about ten feet from the ground. On visiting it on May 19th, there were four eggs, the fifth and last being laid on the 20th. All the young were hatched out on May 30th, and they left the nest on June 11th. Sitting did not actually commence until the full clutch was laid. This gives an incubation period of ten days, and a fledging period of twelve.

It is interesting to note that on June 13th, within 100 yards of the nesting place, I observed a female busily engaged in pulling off fluff from the cloth coverings of some small fish-rearing ponds. I was not able to find any other nest, but have no doubt in my own mind that this pair of birds raised a second brood, as there were certainly no other Redpolls in the district. GEOFFREY C. S. INGRAM.

WILD HYBRID BETWEEN HOUSE-SPARROW AND TREE-SPARROW.

In May 1918 I received a Sparrow killed at Fordham, near Colchester, Essex, on May 1st, 1918. It appeared to me to be a hybrid between a House-Sparrow (*Passer d. domesticus*) and a Tree-Sparrow (*P. montanus*). Dr. Hartert has kindly examined it for me, and he writes me: "The Sparrow you sent me cannot be anything else but a hybrid between the House- and Tree-Sparrow. It has nearly all the characteristics of a Tree-Sparrow, but is larger, especially the bill is much bigger. The black on the throat is more extended than in the Tree-Sparrow, although a little less than in the House-Sparrow, and the chestnut of the crown is darker, more really chestnut. It is an interesting bird." I see M. Suchetet records only three examples in a wild state in his book *Oiseaux Hybrides à l'état sauvage*. J. B. NICHOLS.

NUMBER OF EGGS LAID BY MARSH-WARBLER.

IN Saunders's *Manual* (2nd edition, p. 82) the number of eggs in the clutch of the Marsh-Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*) is given as five to seven, and similar statements are also made in Seebohm's *History of British Birds*, I., p. 378, and Sharpe's *Handbook of the Birds of Great Britain*, I., p. 235. I am aware that continental dealers occasionally send over clutches of six eggs from the Continent, but from a somewhat extensive acquaintance with this species in the west of England, have come to the conclusion that in England, at any rate, this bird has a tendency to lay less rather than more than five eggs in the clutch. Dozens of nests which I have inspected contained only four eggs, while I have very often found the bird incubating clutches of three, and occasionally have met with two only. However, this year (1919) for the first time in fifteen years' experience, I found a nest with six eggs, in Gloucestershire, and should be interested to learn whether any of your readers has had a similar experience.

ALFRED THOMAS.

[It is difficult to guess upon what authority the statements of Seebohm and Saunders mentioned above were made. The normal clutch of the Marsh-Warbler is undoubtedly four to five eggs, and clutches of six are exceptional on the Continent, while we are not aware of any previously recorded instance in England. Naumann says the eggs are generally four or five, more rarely six in number, while Rey says that the clutch consists of five eggs, sometimes four only, while he never met with six. R. B. Sharpe and A. G. Butler have copied the statements of Seebohm and Saunders into their works, but in Howard's *British Warblers* and the *British Bird Book* the information is more correct.

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

ARE CUCKOOS EVER REARED BY GREENFINCHES ?

MR. J. H. OWEN in his notes (*antea*, p. 109), on "Cuckoo's Eggs and Nestlings in 1919," mentions the finding of a Cuckoo's egg in a Greenfinch's nest, but he does not refer to the subsequent history of this egg. In volume VI., p. 331, Mr. Owen records that a young Cuckoo left the nest of a Bullfinch "alive" and apparently well. There does not seem, however, to be any other information, at any rate, I have been unable to find any, about the hatching of Cuckoo's eggs and the rearing of the young birds by other than purely insectivorous species. Possibly the occurrence of Cuckoo's eggs in the nests

of "hard-billed" species being somewhat unusual, more often than not leads to the taking of the eggs and so opportunities for subsequent observation are lost, but it must occur from time to time that young Cuckoos are found in nests of these species. My attention was first drawn to this subject by an experiment that I made this year. On May 18th I found a Hedge-Sparrow's nest in south-west Kent containing a Cuckoo's egg and two of the owner's, a third lying recently broken on the grass a few yards from the nest. Now this was the first and only Hedge-Sparrow's nest on this property since the stock was completely wiped out by the 1916-17 winter, and as I was particularly anxious that they should rear a brood, and it being perfectly obvious that if the Cuckoo's egg remained in their nest they would not do so, I removed it and placed it in the nest of a Greenfinch that contained three eggs (removing one of the latter). The Greenfinch's nest was the only one available at the moment, in the correct stage for substitution. The Cuckoo's egg was of the ordinary Pied Wagtail type. Both birds completed their clutches and the Hedge-Sparrows reared their brood. The Cuckoo's egg also hatched and the Greenfinch's eggs or young were evidently ejected in the usual manner. I was unable to revisit the nest, however, until June 14th, when I found the young Cuckoo dead in the nest. It had evidently lived and been fed by its foster-parents for some days, as it had died on reaching the stage when the larger quill-feathers had just begun to sprout. It is exceedingly unlikely that any accident had befallen the foster-parents.

It seems to me that this result is really what one would naturally expect, the regurgitated, partly digested, vegetarian food supplied by the Greenfinches suffices for the young Cuckoo until it reaches a certain size and stage of development, but is insufficient or the proteid in it is inadequately digested in sufficient quantity when the purely insectivorous Cuckoo reaches that size and requires to begin to make feathers. The question naturally follows: are young Cuckoos ever reared to maturity by Greenfinches? N. F. TICEHURST.

FIERCE ATTACK ON A CUCKOO BY A MEADOW-PIPIT.

I WAS standing in the open in the middle of a marsh near Dublin, in June 1919, when two Cuckoos (*Cuculus c. canorus*) came flying by, one about five yards behind the other. The second one made the usual call note, and was, therefore,

probably the male. The first one was evidently a female, judging by its subsequent activities and general appearance. Soon after the Cuckoos had passed me about six Meadow-Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*) joined in a pursuit of the female. Then the cock bird went away from her and she flew up and down the marsh four or five times. When she did this it was curious to see a Meadow-Pipit attack her furiously as she passed a particular spot. Twice I saw it actually settle on her back and hang on to a feather. On both occasions the Pipit was knocked off to the ground by the Cuckoo making a sudden turn to one side. The Cuckoo subsequently settled in this spot, and three Pipits kept on flying up into the air, then down on to the ground near her. This they gave up doing after about ten minutes. NORMAN H. JOY.

ONE PAIR OF MEADOW-PIPITS FEEDING TWO YOUNG CUCKOOS.

On the " Burrows " at Tenby, on August 7th, 1919, I watched two young Cuckoos tended by a single pair of Meadow-Pipits. They were practically full grown and fairly strong in flight, though they frequently alighted amongst the dunes and called continuously for food. If one bird rose to follow one of the Pipits, the other also flew and alighted near it. Presumably, as only two birds were feeding them, they had been reared in the same nest and neither had succeeded in dislodging its companion.

Though apparently about the same age, they were strikingly distinct in plumage. Both had the usual pale edges to the feathers and the white nape spot, but the ground-colour in one was the normal rufous above and buff beneath, whereas in the other it was grey above and almost white below. I could not say if one Pipit confined its attention to one particular Cuckoo, for both Pipits were often absent seeking food at the same time. I did, however, feel satisfied that the two were fed by different methods. The foster-parent approached the grey Cuckoo from in front and passed the food into its wide-open mouth, but when a Pipit fed the red bird it mounted upon its back, jumping on from behind, and fed it from there. As a rule the Pipits, after delivering the food, hopped or flew out of the way to avoid the vicious dig which usually follows the receipt of a gift, but once a Pipit transferred the food in three instalments, the Cuckoo keeping its mouth open until the last had been received and then pecked at the donor. T. A. COWARD.

YOUNG BUZZARD TAKES A SHOWER BATH.

RECENTLY I made a curious observation upon a young Buzzard (*Buteo b. buteo*), which has been in my possession since it was completely enclosed in down. The young bird (I do not yet know its sex) was hatched about May 23rd, 1919, and is now (August 4th) just shedding the last flakes



of down. It takes a bath on alternate days and has done so for a week or more. In the evening of August 4th it rained heavily and I expected to see the bird retire to its shelter; it did not do so, but flew to a perch in the open and stood lifting its wings to the horizontal and sometimes higher; then it would flap them and return them again to the horizontal position and fully outstretched as the rain beat upon

them. As the wings became heavy with moisture the latter was shaken off or the wings were drooped to the sides. But they were never closed, and the original movements and postures were soon resumed again. The harder it rained the more outstretched the wings were held; as the rain abated the outstretching would decrease. It took some time to convince me that the bird was welcoming the hard shower, but eventually I found this conclusion irresistible because, while it still rained, the bird commenced on the perch those curtseying movements which, while bathing, immerse the lower breast and belly-feathers. These movements were repeated on more than one occasion. When the rain ceased the bird flew to its shelter and remained there for the night. I attempted to photograph the Buzzard with the wings horizontal, but movement, which was never quite absent, and a hopeless light made it impossible; however, I was able to obtain a picture of the resting position, assumed when the horizontal position became tiring, and of this I enclose a print.

T. LEWIS.

PROBABLE MONTAGU'S HARRIER BREEDING IN SUSSEX.

WHEN at Brighton last month Mr. W. Swaysland told me that a Harrier had bred on the Downs near the town in the spring of 1919, and four young were hatched, which were taken by some boys, one of them having been brought to him. He thought it to be Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*), not the Hen-Harrier, and from his description it seems tolerably certain it was this species, which has bred formerly near Brighton.

H. KIRKE SWANN.

WHOOOPER IN ROSS-SHIRE IN JUNE.

ON June 5th, 1919, when proceeding to fish on Loch Beannacharan, an extension of the Meig, one of the main affluents of the River Conon, I was surprised to find a Whooper (*Cygnus cygnus*) on it, which had undoubtedly arrived overnight. It remained on the loch until the morning of June 13th, but in the interval, paid visits to some of the smaller hill lochs. I found the bird somewhat shy when I attempted to approach it on foot, but vehicles passing did not disconcert it to the same extent. While the plumage was perfectly white, it showed a trace of immaturity in the upper mandible, which was of a creamy-yellow colour, instead of the full lemon-yellow of the adult Whooper.

D. MACDONALD.

LARGE CLUTCH OF EGGS OF LITTLE GREBE.

MAJOR C. SMEED recorded a remarkable clutch of ten eggs of the Little Grebe (*Podiceps v. ruficollis*) from west Sussex in May 1918 (*Br. Birds*, XII., p. 189). At the time I had never heard of more than seven eggs being found in a nest, and that only very rarely, but Mr. N. S. Mundy, a well-known and reliable observer, states in a letter to Mr. E. C. Stuart Baker, that on August 30th, 1919, he found a nest of Little Grebe on the river below Oxford with eight eggs. He did not take them, and on revisiting the spot on September 8th found the bird still sitting. Instances of the breeding of the Little Grebe in September have already been recorded in *Brit. Birds*, II., p. 242.

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.

WOODCOCKS PERCHING ON TREES.

ON May 27th, 1919, I was drifting down the River Bure in a sailing boat on a still day, and close to Wroxham Broad I saw a bird perched on one of the topmost branches of a dead tree, some 50 yards ahead. I thought at first it was a Turtle-Dove, but bringing my glasses to bear upon it, was intensely surprised to see that it was a Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*).

There was nothing to impede a distinct view of the bird, and I could see the bird's plumage and markings perfectly, and though it was perched with its back towards me, an occasional turning of the head gave a good view of the beak and eye, as the boat slowly drifted by. My friend, Major Robertson was in a wherry some 300 yards behind, and I rowed back immediately to call his attention to it. The bird never moved, and as we again drifted slowly past, we had a good look at it at not more than 30 yards distance, and both were sure that it was a Woodcock. The two men in the wherry also agreed with us.

I may mention we both know the bird well, and have probably shot and handled some hundreds.

Mr. Pegg, of Wroxham, who is a keen naturalist and observer of birds, assures me that he had twice seen Woodcocks perched in trees and on one occasion he put the bird off, and was quite sure of its identity.

A friend of mine to whom I related this incident also told me that he was one day coming home from shooting through a wood in Wales with another guest, when they saw two birds perched in a tree. One of them flew off, but the other remained till they were within shot, and on its taking wing my friend shot it, and found on picking it up that it was a Woodcock.

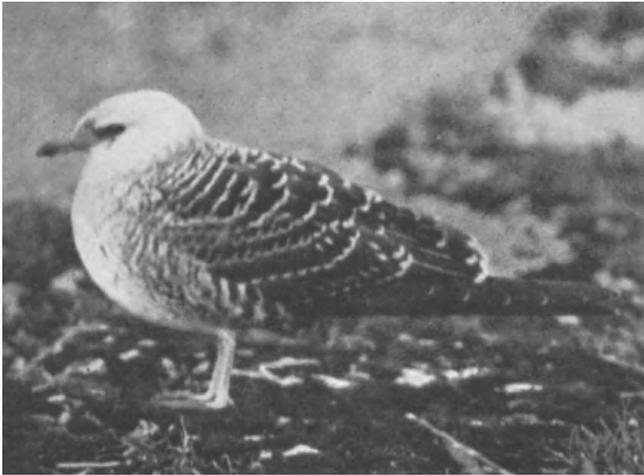
Since writing the above I have seen another Woodcock perch in a tree. This was on September 14th, in the Isle of Arran, when Commander Chambers and I put up a Woodcock out of some bracken, and the bird flew into a wood and alighted on a small nut tree. It remained perched long enough for us to have a good look at it.

CHARLES C. DALLAS.

[For other recorded instances of the Woodcock and other Waders perching see *British Birds*, Vol. IX., p. 254; *cf.* also note by Mr. E. Harvey (*Field*), December 13th, 1913.—EDS.]

PROBABLE LONG-TAILED SKUA IN HERTFORDSHIRE.

ON August 27th, 1919, I saw a Skua flying over the Tring Reservoirs. It settled on the banks, and I found that I was able to get to within a few yards of it. The following day,



which was very stormy, I was able to take several photographs of it as it swam on the rough water or settled on the banks. By taking care not to make any sudden movement, I managed to get to within a yard of it, and by kneeling on the ground could examine it closely. It was about 12 inches in length. The head and breast were almost pure white, the top of the head being very slightly spotted, back and wings were greyish-black, the feathers being edged with white, with here

and there just a trace of pale brown in the edging. The bill was grey, tipped with black, and the legs light grey, with the feet black.

Dr. Hartert and I examined the skins in the Tring Museum, comparing them with the photograph, and there seems little doubt that the visitor to the reservoirs was a Long-tailed Skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*).

While I watched the bird it caught several small fish, and also pecked at the remains of a half-pound roach which was lying on the bank; whether it caught the latter I could not say, as this might have been left there by an angler. The Skua showed no signs of fear, and even after some small boys had pelted it with stones it returned to its favourite corner, remaining there until August 30th. O. G. PIKE.