

NOTES

NOTES FROM LEICESTERSHIRE.

RAVEN (*C. corax*).—Mr. J. Freeman, who knows the bird well in a wild state, saw a Raven at Wanlip in November 1919.

WILLOW-TIT (*P. atricapillus kleinschmidti*).—In November 1919 I shot a pair of Titmice at Queniborough, one of which I submitted to Mr. H. F. Witherby, who informs me that it is a Willow-Tit. This is, I believe, the first record of this species from Leicestershire.

SWALLOW (*H. r. rustica*).—First seen at Wanlip on March 27th, 1920.

CUCKOO (*C. c. canorus*).—First seen at Queniborough on March 31st, 1920. Both of these are unusually early dates for the Midlands.

HOBBY (*F. s. subbuteo*).—A male was trapped by a keeper at Queniborough on July 5th, 1920.

COMMON BUZZARD (*B. buteo*).—One, by its size a female, was seen by myself and keeper at Barkby Thorpe on May 1st, 1920. It passed quite close to us, flying low in a strong wind.

HEN-HARRIER (*C. cyaneus*).—Four were seen some few miles from Queniborough in September 1920, and one of them, which had been shot, I examined on the 23rd, and found to be an immature male.

MANX SHEARWATER (*P. p. puffinus*).—A male was picked up dead in Humberstone village on October 3rd, 1920, and examined by me on the next day.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*T. hypoleuca*).—During the first week of May 1920 I saw a migratory party of twenty along the River Soar, at Wanlip.

GREEN SANDPIPER (*T. ochropus*).—On September 15th, 1920, one flew close by me at Queniborough and another was shot at Measham, during the first week in October, while several others were seen on Gadesby Brook and at Barkby Thorpe.

CURLEW (*N. arquata*).—Mr. J. Freeman saw six Curlews pass over Thurmaston, calling repeatedly, about the end of September 1920.

WHIMBREL (*N. phaeopus*).—When walking along the brook at Queniborough on September 9th, 1920, I saw three Whimbrel, which passed quite close to me, and on the next day a single bird flew overhead, calling several times.

W. HUBERT BARROW.

CONTINENTAL JAY IN KENT.

ON November 6th, 1920, I shot a specimen of the Continental Jay (*Garrulus g. glandarius*) at Fairhill, between Tonbridge and Sevenoaks. Records for Kent, particularly the west of the county, appear to be not numerous. P. A. BUXTON.

BRAMBLINGS IN WESTMORLAND.

THE Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) is not usually a very abundant or regular visitor to the Lake District, it is therefore perhaps worth recording that large numbers have been present this autumn (1920), no doubt attracted by the exceptionally good crop of beech-mast, which seldom ripens in this neighbourhood. The birds were first noticed on October 20th, a flock of twenty or so, and thereafter in increasing numbers until on November 9th a very large assemblage was seen. They were wild and restless, and it was difficult to make a satisfactory estimate of their numbers, but I have little hesitation in saying that there were not fewer than one thousand, possibly far more. A. ASTLEY.

LATE STAY OF YELLOW WAGTAIL.

IN *British Birds*, Vol. X., p. 269, I recorded a Yellow Wagtail (*M. f. rayi*) seen at Alston, Cumberland, on November 1st, 1916, but that record has been eclipsed to-day (November 30th, 1920). Walking up to the village this morning, I was astonished to see a female fly into one of the small enclosures close to the houses. It had for companions on the grass a couple of Mistle-Thrushes and seven Magpies. The morning was bright and frosty after two or three days of wet, muggy weather, but later in the day it clouded over and turned wet again; I was then out on the high fells grouse-driving and the only non-game birds seen during the day were several Snow Buntings, a Raven, and some Hooded Crows—nothing unusual about these, but scarcely the sort of birds one expects to see on the same day as a Yellow Wagtail! Alston, it may be added, stands 1,000 feet above the sea.

GEORGE BOLAM.

ON December 4th, 1920, I saw a Yellow Wagtail on the shore of Bassenthwaite Lake, Cumberland. There was no mistaking the species, for I watched it through glasses from a very short distance for several minutes, while it strutted about near the edge of the water. H. A. BOOTH.

GREY WAGTAIL BREEDING IN SUSSEX.

Two pairs of Grey Wagtails (*Motacilla c. cinerea*) bred on a stream near Battle, within half a mile of each other, in 1920.

The young in both cases were seen out of the nest with the parents and both nests were found, one on the face of the stream bank, the other in a hole in the brickwork connected with a sluice-gate.

HUGH WHISTLER.

[Cf. *British Birds*, II., p. 376 and VI., p. 18.—EDS.]

MIGRATORY WHITE WAGTAILS IN YORKSHIRE IN AUTUMN.

ON September 23rd, 1920, a friend and I visited the ruins of Egliston or Egglestone Abbey, about two miles south of Barnard Castle, on the Yorkshire side of the Tees, and there I saw three White Wagtails (*Motacilla a. alba*) running about on the turf within the enclosure, one of which had an entirely grey crown. On my return home I looked up this species in Nelson's *Birds of Yorkshire* and found it stated (p. 124) that so far this bird had entirely escaped observation in Yorkshire during the autumn migration.

This fact is a surprising one to me, for on the sewage outfall works, at Ewood Bridge, near Rawtenstall (E. Lancashire), less than ten miles from the Yorkshire border, I have seen migratory White Wagtails every spring and autumn, and as a rule more in autumn than in spring, for several years. The regularity of their appearance along with that of many Pied and Yellow Wagtails (*M. a. lugubris* and *M. f. rayi*) seems to suggest something of a fly route, and I have supposed that in spring they were making for the Ribble Valley and that those seen in autumn had come to the sewage works by that route; though of this I can give no proof beyond the observed direction of the flight of travelling parties, which is as a rule towards the Whalley Gap—a great southern gate to the Ribble country. To me it appears probable that if observers who know the bird and live in the neighbourhood of the Yorkshire Ribble would keep a good look out at the migratory seasons they would find White Wagtails there.

C. K. PARKER.

MALE WHINCHAT MATED TO TWO FEMALES.

ON May 30th, 1917, I flushed a female Whinchat (*Saxicola r. rubetra*) on a hillside near the Bowland Forest district, in Lancashire, and was greatly surprised to find a nest containing twelve eggs. I retired and watched closely for an hour or so, during which time the female returned to the nest, whilst a male and another female approached. The male visited the nest, but during the time I was able to stay the other female, whilst remaining near it, never actually visited it. It certainly

appeared to be a case of bigamy, and I greatly regretted not being able to visit the nest again to see if the other female also frequented it.

J. WILCOCK.

BLACK REDSTART IN DORSET.

IN *British Birds*, Vol. IX., p. 184, I recorded the occurrence of a pair of Black Redstarts (*Phœnicurus o. gibraltariensis*) during six consecutive winters on the Parish Church at Blandford. From 1915 to 1919 I was not living in the town and so cannot say if they continued their visits, but being in the town in the latter part of October 1919 I kept a look-out and believe I caught sight of a single bird in the same place. On October 30th, 1920, a female or a bird of the year put in an appearance and took up its position on exactly the same points and corners of the masonry which were used by the birds during their visits from 1910-1915.

Altogether I have only met with this species in six different localities, and in five cases out of the six the birds were seen on church towers. The choice of such a situation is, no doubt, owing to the food supply, the sunny walls attracting numberless flies, and providing a happy hunting ground free from disturbance.

If observers would look out in November for the appearance of this bird on church towers or other lofty buildings, it may be discovered to be less uncommon than supposed. I am not aware of a single record for Dorset since the publication of my previous note, so that the recurrence of the bird on Blandford church tower is, I think, worthy of another record.

Since writing the above I spent a morning examining the church towers of Bournemouth, which resulted in one bird (a male) on St. Peter's Church. It was in the same place again on November 22nd.

W. J. ASHFORD.

LATE STAY OF NIGHTJAR AND WRYNECK IN SUSSEX.

WHILE shooting at Ninfield, on October 7th, 1920, a Nightjar (*Caprimulgus eu. europæus*) was put up twice in some low coppice, and on the 5th a Wryneck (*Jynx t. torquilla*) was flushed from a wheat-stubble above Fairlight cliffs.

HUGH WHISTLER.

LATE BREEDING OF BARN-OWL.

ON November 5th, 1920, at Eton, Bucks., I found three young Barn-Owls (*Tyto a. alba*) in a large hole in an elm tree about thirty feet from the ground. One of the parent birds had

left the hole a short time before I explored it, while the young for some days and nights had been heard "snoring" by people passing along the main road, which runs but ten yards from the tree. Two of the young were, as far as I could judge, about four weeks, and the third about three weeks old.

A. MAYALI.

[As nests of the Barn-Owl with eggs or young have been found in every month of the year (with, I believe, the sole exception of January, in which month I have no record) from September to March, as well as in spring and summer, it is difficult to distinguish late from abnormally early breeding. Some further information on the subject will be found in a note by Mr. Miller Christy (*British Birds*, VII., pp. 265-6) and it is interesting to note that winter breeding has also been recorded on the Continent and in the United States, so that the habit is not confined to the white-breasted race.

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

GLOSSY IBIS AND AVOCET IN CO. WEXFORD.

AN immature male Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis f. falcinellus*) was shot in co. Wexford, on October 20th, 1917, and on November 20th, 1917, an adult male Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) was killed at Tacumshane Lake, Broadway, co. Wexford. Both were received by Mr. Williams, Dublin, and the Avocet, a very beautiful bird, passed into my possession.

I must apologize for the belated appearance of these records, but the note got mixed up with some other papers.

C. J. CARROLL.

GADWALL IN ESSEX.

ON November 7th, 1920, I observed two Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) on the lake in Navestock Park, Essex. Strangely enough there were no other ducks on the lake at the time, although Coots (*F. atra*) were numerous. The only record I can find of this species in the county since *The Birds of Essex* was published in 1890 is that of one obtained at Manningtree in December 1913 (*British Birds*, VII., p. 323), and Mr. Miller Christy (*Vict. Hist. Essex*) describes it as a very scarce winter visitor.

WILLIAM E. GLEGG.

MANX SHEARWATER BREEDING ON INISHBOFIN, CO. GALWAY.

ON June 13th, 1920, while staying on Inishbofin, I was shown the nesting-hole of a Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus p. puffinus*). It was high up in a steep grassy slope, on the north side of the island. Having climbed up to it, I found

the old bird sitting on a single egg, which was quite fresh. I caught the bird in my hand, and was able to identify it without any doubt. I could not see any other birds on the island, and though I found several disused burrows, in which, I was told, they had bred in previous years, none of them were occupied this year.

This appears to be the first record of the Manx Shearwater breeding on Inishbofin.

H. B. COTT.

RATE OF PROGRESS OF GREAT CRESTED GREBE UNDER WATER.

It is not often that opportunity offers for the accurate computation of the rate at which a diving bird progresses under water; the following note may, therefore, be of interest.

During a sojourn in Lincolnshire in October 1920 I came upon a Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps c. cristatus*) in the river Glen, where that stream flows straight and sluggish as a canal through the fen country, enclosed by high embankments on either flank, and destitute of weeds or obstruction on the surface as far as the eye can reach. There was no difficulty in getting right on top of the bird, so to speak, nor in following it as far as one listed. This I did for about half an hour, timing the dives by watch and stepping the distance (and I think I may claim to be able to count yards very accurately in that way), and I was surprised at the very slight variation that occurred either in the length of dive or the time it occupied. The bird was followed in either direction it chose to take, and twenty dives did not vary more than three yards in length, nor four seconds in duration; the mean being 77 yards and 58 seconds. I quite expected that both speed and distance covered would have been greater. The bird, I may add, was an adult, and, though naturally doing its best all the time, it showed little signs of fatigue when I left it, and was very rarely at all flurried. It was never noticed to open its wings under water, nor did it once forbear to raise its whole body to the surface, even when it was forced to come up within a few yards of me. For the most part I walked along the top of the bank, some 30 feet above the water, but occasionally descended to the water's edge to get the Grebe at closer quarters.

GEORGE BOLAM.

LITTLE AUK INLAND IN WESTMORLAND.

ON November 20th, 1920, a specimen of the Little Auk (*Alle alle*) was captured by a cat at Ambleside, and was

brought to me the same day for identification. It had no doubt been driven inland by the severe gale of a few days previously.

A. ASTLEY.

BROODING PRIOR TO LAYING.

IN May 1871 I put a Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) from a new hole in a crab-tree in Epping Forest. There were no eggs, and I do not think that the bird was either roosting (it was a sunny afternoon) or at work upon the hole. Fourteen days later I again saw the bird leave the hole, which contained a freshly-picked dandelion only. I do not think the hole had altered during the fortnight I let it alone.

H. M. WALLIS.

[With Green Woodpeckers there is frequently a very considerable period between the apparent completion of the nest-hole and the laying of the first egg, and during that time the bird may be often found in the hole, but whether engaged in putting finishing touches to its interior, roosting, or engaged in premature brooding, it must be very difficult to determine.—EDS.]

STATUS OF CIRL BUNTING IN WARWICKSHIRE.—Mr. T. Ground kindly communicates the following note by the late A. Geoffrey Leigh: "The Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirrus*) is strictly confined to a part of the southern division of Warwickshire. Mr. R. F. Toms (*Vict. Hist. of Warwick.*, I., p. 196) states that it is most frequent in the Avon valley, and instances the neighbourhood of Stratford-on-Avon, adding that it has occurred rarely at Leamington. This marks the eastern and northern limit of its distribution, with the exception of one breeding record from Great Alne about 1882 (*Zool.*, 1892, p. 122). Farther south it appears to breed irregularly over the lower slopes of the Edgehills. Mr. Aplin records (*loc. cit.*) its occurrence at Idlicote in 1882 or 1883 and a male at Brailes on June 13th, 1884.

"On May 14th, 1914, I saw two males and two females between Combrook and Butler's Marston, the only occasion on which I have met with the species in the county. One of the males was carrying food."

SWALLOWS IN DECEMBER.—Captain C. R. S. Pitman, D.S.O., informs us that at midday on December 10th, 1920, a Swallow (*Hirundo r. rustica*) was hawking for insects up and down the road from Paignton to Torquay, after a bitter night and white frost in early morning. In the *Field*

(Dec. 18th, 1920, p. 856) Mr. J. S. Pratt states that he saw a Swallow at Worthing on December 6th.

THE ALTITUDE OF MIGRATORY FLIGHT.—In connection with our notice (*antea*, p. 165) of Col. R. Meinertzhagen's paper on this subject, Mr. H. M. Wallis writes that while at sea on August 2nd, 1914, off Boston Deep and out of sight of land, he saw at 10.30 a.m. a red Homer approaching the ship from the westward, flying rapidly just above the tops of the waves. It rose to pass between the masts of the ship and then dropped to its former level and continued on its course due east. A second similar bird appeared soon after, but, being drenched with rain, settled on the ship, where it remained all day. This interesting observation shows that, though trained to find their way by sight, a non-migratory species like the Homing Pigeon can assume and keep a course at such an altitude that sight can be of very little use to it.