

NOTES

AUTUMN MIGRATION ACROSS THE IRISH SEA.

CROSSING to Holyhead from Dublin (Kingstown), on November 7th, 1921, I witnessed a well-marked east to west migration along the steamer route. The distance from harbour to harbour is, I believe, 64 miles, and the passage was accomplished in exactly two hours and forty minutes. We cast off at Kingstown at 8.40 a.m. At 9.10, when off The Kish Lightship, a flock of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), consisting of about a dozen individuals, passed us, flying low, and heading straight up Dublin Bay instead of for the nearest land which was Howth Head. At intervals of, roughly, half an hour four more large and medium-sized flocks were encountered all heading west, and flying from 10 to 50 feet above the sea. Near mid-channel two flocks (one dense) of Finches were passed, flying low, in the same direction, followed by a solitary Jackdaw (*Colæus monedula*) struggling along just above the waves. Coming up to The Stack two or three Greenfinches (*Chloris chloris*) passed, going out to sea, and also a couple of Rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*). There was a cold N.W. breeze blowing when we left Kingstown, which stiffened into a nasty "nor'-wester" off Holyhead, accompanied by showers of sleet, and a waterspout, an unusual phenomenon in these latitudes, which was visible about seven miles away on the starboard beam. As I was only watching from the sheltered starboard side I am unable to say what passed us on the weather side. H. A. F. MAGRATH.

WOOD-LARK BREEDING IN RADNORSHIRE.

So far as I am aware the Wood-Lark (*Lullula a. arborea*) has not yet been recorded as breeding in Radnorshire, and therefore it may be interesting to record that in May 1920 I found near Knighton a Wood-Lark's nest with an addled egg. Also on May 8th, 1921, I found a nest containing three young within three miles of the 1920 nest. Further, I located another pair midway between these two sites, but owing to my subsequent absence from the neighbourhood I was unable to find the nest. I have done a great deal of field work in the neighbourhood for the last seventeen years, and I do not think it likely that I have overlooked this bird, as its beautiful song is bound to attract one immediately.

O. R. OWEN.

WAXWINGS IN FORFARSHIRE, NORTHAMPTON-SHIRE AND DEVONSHIRE.

ON November 12th, 1921, I saw two Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) on a wild-rose bush in a hedge near Broughty Ferry. The hedge was by the side of a main road, and the birds, when disturbed by a passing motor, flew out for a few yards and then returned to the same bush, affording a clear view.

T. LESLIE SMITH.

IT may be worth recording that on November 11th, 1921, I saw two Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*) in a hedgerow near Ashton Wold, Oundle. They were busily engaged in devouring hips and allowed me to approach within a few yards. I visited the locality next day but failed to see them again.

N. CHARLES ROTHSCHILD.

WHILE walking near the coast near Dartmouth on September 25th, 1921, we saw two strange stumpy birds which we could not at once identify. They were brown, with black throats, tails and primaries with a lighter bar, yellow and white on the wings, a yellow tip to their tails and short crests. They were flying in front of us about fifty yards away, settling on the hedge or in the field until we got nearer. They constantly uttered a high twittering call-note. We identified them later as Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*), the first we have seen here. On October 16th and 27th we saw them again in the same neighbourhood.

J. P. W. FURSE AND H. T. BONHAM.

WOOD-WARBLER SINGING WHILST BROODING.

APPROPOS of Mr. G. C. S. Ingram's remarks (*antea*, p. 80) as to the Blackcap (*Sylvia a. atricapilla*) singing whilst brooding, it may be of interest to record that I have seen a Wood-Warbler (*Phylloscopus s. sibilatrix*) behaving similarly. I had been watching the pair some time with a view to discovering their nest, when the male suddenly dropped down in the manner in which this species usually approaches its nest, and swiftly entered it. As soon as it appeared to have settled in the nest it boldly poured out its song as loudly as if it had been singing on the top of a tree. This it twice afterwards repeated at intervals of about one minute, then remained silent. This happened in Axwell Park, near Blaydon-on-Tyne, in May 1898, about 4.30 a.m., in full view of me within 15 feet of the nest, lying upon a tree that had fallen to an angle of about 70 degrees. I have enjoyed considerable experience in watching birds nesting, but this is the only instance I can recall of its kind.

ISAAC CLARK.

RAPID RE-BUILDING BY BONELLI'S WARBLER AND TITS.

WITH reference to Mr. Musselwhite's note (*antea*, p. 140) on rapid re-nesting of a Whitethroat (*Sylvia c. communis*), after having had a clutch of considerably incubated eggs removed, I think an experience I had in Spain in 1920 may be of interest. On May 16th I found three nests of Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*), each containing five eggs two lots proved to be nearly hatching, and the third was very much incubated. During the next three days I found all three pairs very busily re-building within a few yards of their respective first nest sites.

On May 23rd each nest contained one egg and incubation commenced with four, five and five eggs respectively on May 26th and May 27th.

The period in one case was therefore ten days, and in the other two cases eleven days. The time period is, I know, not exceptional, but interesting points are that the first clutches were nearly hatched when taken, and all three pairs of birds behaved in exactly the same way to a day.

W. M. CONGREVE.

As showing the extremely short period which elapses before a bird whose nest has been taken or destroyed begins to nest again, the following incident which was witnessed by Major W. M. Congreve and myself in Marocco, may be of interest. On April 26th, 1920, we had taken a nest with ten eggs (in which incubation had begun) of the Ultramarine Tit (*Parus caeruleus ultramarinus*) from an old Woodpecker's boring in a cork oak. While sitting close at hand and examining the structure of the nest, we noticed the hen making journeys to and from the nest-hole, and satisfied ourselves by watching with glasses that she was carrying fresh nesting material into the hole within a few minutes of the removal of the original nest.

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.

RAPID RE-NESTING OF THE COMMON WHITETHROAT.

WITH reference to Mr. Musselwhite's note (*antea*, p. 140) the normal nest of this bird (*Sylvia c. communis*) is built very quickly though I have no records at hand, but (in this district at least) large numbers of "cock's" nests are built by unmated males, as I wrote in the *Irish Naturalist* of October-November, 1918. Several may be built by the same bird before he gets a mate, if ever. These nests have

not the finer grass lining or hair which is added by the female, though the male has a strange propensity to pile willow-down about the edges. These "cock's" nests can be built in from one to one-and-a-half days. Therefore, with a female present the two days for a complete nest as given by Mr. Musselwhite tallies with my experience. In the case of Wrens and their "cock" nests an egg may be laid before the lining by the female is complete, but this was not likely to happen with Mr. Musselwhite's female which had just been incubating her full clutch.

J. P. BURKITT.

[Mr. Burkitt's note, though interesting, appears to us to miss the point raised by Mr. Musselwhite's record, which is not that a Whitethroat can build a nest in a hurry, but that a female should be in condition to lay again so quickly after incubating a clutch for nearly the full period.—EDS.]

EGG-LAYING HABITS OF CUCKOO.

WHILST taking a walk across a common near Knighton on the afternoon of May 22nd, 1921, in company with Mr. Edgar Chance and Mr. Herbert Massey, I was startled by hearing some birds fly quickly past me and, turning round, observed a Cuckoo (*Cuculus c. canorus*) chased by five Meadow-Pipits just about to alight on the ground not twenty yards from me.

I immediately looked at my watch and it was 4.30 p.m., and having learned along with Mr. Chance in 1920 that a Cuckoo laid in the afternoon regularly, I thought it quite probable that this one might do so. I had momentarily lost sight of my friends but soon caught sight of Mr. Chance and beckoned him to me; before he reached me the Cuckoo had again flown down to the ground close to where I saw it alight before. It was soon away again, flying into a larch tree some 200 yards away on the edge of the common, and we searched for a nest; not finding one we walked a little distance away and, while doing so we saw the Cuckoo leave the larch tree and glide right over us, alighting on the ground this time by the side of a Meadow-Pipit's nest, and hopping on to it, remained about ten seconds, then flying clear away. We ran to the site and found the nest contained one Cuckoo's egg quite warm and one egg of the Meadow-Pipit. We watched from about 60 yards' distance.

This is now the fifth Cuckoo I have personally known to lay in the afternoon, so it may reasonably be assumed that this is the most favoured time of day for the Cuckoo to lay.

O. R. OWEN.

GLOSSY IBIS IN CUMBERLAND.

ON October 19th, 1920, a Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis f. falcinellus*) was shot at Moor House, near Carlisle. It is the first and only record for Cumberland. L. E. HOPE.

VELVET-SCOTER IN CHESHIRE.

ON the rocks of Hilbre Island, at the mouth of the River Dee, and in the water close under them I saw on October 30th, 1921, a flock of thirty Common Scoters (*Oidemia n. nigra*) and with them a female or young male Velvet-Scoter (*Oidemia f. fusca*) ; I had a good view of the latter both in flight and on the water. On November 12th the flock had increased to about fifty birds, and included two Velvet-Scoters, similar in plumage to the one previously seen. Though seen from time to time on the coasts of Lancashire and North Wales, the Velvet-Scoter has not been recorded previously from Cheshire.

A. W. BOYD.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE IN SOMERSET.

A RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) was shot at Blagdon Reservoir, Somerset, by Mr. Smythe, of Butcombe, on September 21st, 1921. I saw it in the flesh on September 24th and again examined the skin on October 4th at Mr. Whish's studio, Lympsham, Somerset, whither the bird had been sent for preservation. This is the first known occurrence in the county. STANLEY LEWIS.

SABINE'S GULL IN CUMBERLAND.

ON October 8th, 1921, an immature female Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) was shot by a local fowler on Newton Marsh, near Carlisle. It is in first autumn plumage, with the brownish grey bars on the upper-parts, but has commenced to moult, a few grey-blue feathers having appeared on the wing-coverts. It is the second example recorded for Cumberland.

L. E. HOPE.

MR. CHANCE'S FILM OF THE CUCKOO.—Mr. Edgar Chance has already described in these pages his work on the Cuckoo during 1918, 1919 and 1920 (see Vols. XII., pp. 182-4; XIII., pp. 90-5; XIV., pp. 218-232) and this summer (1921) he has continued this work with very interesting and valuable results. Acting on the knowledge gained in previous years, and adopting more or less the same plan, he was able to predict when and where the Cuckoo would lay with such accuracy that Mr. E. Hawkins, concealed in a "hide" near the Meadow-Pipit's nests, successfully "filmed" the Cuckoo

on six separate occasions. This film was shown to the British Ornithologists' Club and the Zoological Society in November, and illustrated with remarkable clearness the Cuckoo's glide down from a tree, its actions about the nest, and even the taking of one of the fosterer's eggs in its bill, the last incident being also shown in a slide from a photograph by Miss E. L. Turner.

The knowledge of when and where the Cuckoo will lay has made it possible, not only to photograph the bird, but for a number of observers (among them the present writer) to watch it from a "hide" placed close to the chosen nest, and perhaps one of the most interesting of Mr. Chance's discoveries has been in connection with the actual egg-laying. After sitting motionless in a crouching attitude for a period varying from one to three hours on a bough of a tree from 50 to 150 yards from the Meadow-Pipit's nest, the Cuckoo glides down to the ground. She then often returns to the tree and glides down again, sometimes several times, but eventually goes to the nest, and having taken out with her bill one of the eggs of the fosterer, sits on the nest and lays her own egg in it. The actual time she is sitting on the nest is remarkably short—from five to eight seconds—and this is no doubt made possible by the egg being ready for extrusion when she leaves the tree. Were this not so, and had the Cuckoo to sit on the nest for an hour or so, the fosterer would doubtless desert. At the same time, Mr. Chance discovered by experiment that the Cuckoo could retain its egg for several hours even after it had made its glide, should the necessity arise.

That the Cuckoo actually lays in the nest is a very interesting fact, but Mr. Chance makes it clear that this statement refers only to those birds he has watched. As eggs have often been found in nests in which it would be impossible for a Cuckoo to sit, certain individuals must deposit their eggs with the bill.

We congratulate Mr. Chance on the film, which has a definite value scientifically as well as educationally, and we hope that having discovered so much that was previously unknown he will be encouraged to continue his observations on the Cuckoo's habits, which present many points that are still obscure.—H. F. W.

THE RELATION OF SONG TO NESTING IN BIRDS.—Mr. J. P. Burkitt contributes a further valuable article on this subject to *The Irish Naturalist* for October, 1921. During the past spring and summer he made close observations on

the song of individual Chaffinches, Blackbirds, Song-Thrushes, and some other species at Enniskillen. In every case he found that song diminished after a mate appeared, and that the birds that continued in full song during the breeding-season appeared to be mateless. After the first broods were fledged, however, revival of song was noted, but not for long. It appears from his observations that in north Ireland most birds stop singing entirely three or four weeks earlier than in south-east England.

He also gives interesting particulars of the times of day when each species sings most; these evidently change as the season advances. His notes on fighting, too, and on "territory" generally, are a useful commentary on Mr. Howard's theories, and he notices changes in feeding-habits during the season. It appears that two of his Blackbirds, which, one gathers, were mated all through the winter, never sang at all! His conclusions are first, that vigorous song, even the residual song of autumn, indicates the will to mate, and that the restriction of breeding to spring-time is solely due to the lack of response on the part of the females; secondly, that vigorous song is to all intents and purposes restricted to the breeding territory, whatever the season may be.

H. G. A.

SPREAD OF LITTLE OWL TO SUSSEX COAST.—With reference to a note on this subject (*antea*, p. 119) Mr. H. Bentham writes that he saw a Little Owl between Shoreham and Bramber on July 25th, 1919, and the following year a pair was nesting about a mile south of Henfield, while on December 26th, 1920, he heard a Little Owl on the South Downs close to Steyning. Capt. H. F. Stoneham also informs us that he has a young bird, obtained at Shoreham in 1919, which must have been bred in the vicinity.

INLAND OCCURRENCES OF WADERS.—Mr. H. G. Alexander has suggested to us that an enquiry into the occurrences of Waders at reservoirs this autumn would be worth while in view of the drought, as this has caused most of the reservoirs to be very low, and consequently a considerable amount of mud has been exposed, thus affording an attraction to Waders. We shall, therefore, be glad if any of our readers who have been in the habit of watching birds at reservoirs and also at sewage farms would give us details of the occurrences of Waders at these places this year with a comparison, if possible, of previous years. Our knowledge of the migration of Waders across country is still very scanty, and these observations might throw some light on the subject.—EDS.