

## LETTERS.

## FORMER BREEDING OF THE OSPREY IN IRELAND.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—I quite agree with Mr. Kirke Swann's remarks (*antea*, p. 220). If the Rev. F. L. Blathwayt will refer to Thompson's *Natural History of Ireland*, 1849, Vol. I., p. 24, also the footnote pp. 29/30, he will see Thompson definitely stated there was no proof of the Osprey breeding at Killarney, or elsewhere in Ireland. This view, so far as my experience goes, has always been supported by the later authorities on Irish ornithology.

The following extract from Rutt's *Natural History of the County of Dublin*, 1772, Vol. I., pp. 296/7, will show what confusion existed in regard to the two species at that time:—

"*Haliaeetus sine Ossifraga*. The Osprey or Sea Eagle. Said "to have been found about Lambay."

Undoubtedly this remark refers to the White-tailed Eagle.

GEO. R. HUMPHREYS.

UPTON LODGE, DRUMCONDRA, DUBLIN, 4th February, 1922.

## SHARE OF INCUBATION IN THE TURNSTONE.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—With regard to Mr. Gordon's observations (*antea*, p. 216), it seems quite possible that the male bird may have been affected by the close proximity of the hiding tent, as it is a matter of common experience that one bird of a pair is often indifferent to observation, while the other is very shy. In every case we noted where the eggs were hatching, the male was incubating, except in one instance where the birds had been recently disturbed and in this case we flushed the hen from the eggs.

OXFORD, February 5th, 1922.

A. H. PAGET WILKES.

## OYSTERCATCHERS OPENING OYSTERS.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—You may be interested to know that Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) at present in the Scottish Zoological Park, have been, almost certainly, opening oysters put out for them. Unfortunately no one, so far, has witnessed the act, as the birds are intolerably shy in the presence of humans. But no other bird in the waders' aviary is likely to have tackled such a stiff problem as an oyster, so that it is, as I have said, almost certain that the Oystercatchers have done so. I tried the experiment last winter without any success. This winter I had two more birds to work with, and these were fresh from the sea-beach. After a fortnight's work on mussels (*Mytilus*) the birds apparently tackled the oysters at once. Out of the first six bivalves put out five were opened and cleaned in not more than five days. Of two in my possession one has evidently been dealt with like a limpet, while the other shows signs of long-continued chipping or gouging along the edge of one valve. These two shells are 4.5 and 5 cm. in length respectively. I am continuing the experiment, and hope that some one may be fortunate enough to witness the act of opening an oyster before all the shells I have are used up.

EDINBURGH, January 19th, 1922.

J. M. DEWAR.

## ALBINISTIC GULLS AND IVORY-GULLS.

*To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.*

SIRS,—Regarding the Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain's note (*antea*, p. 214), I quite agree with him that my record of a probable Ivory-Gull at Cardiff, April 3rd, 1921, cannot be accepted as indisputable, especially in view of the fact that this bird, or a similar one, was seen again as late as June 13th. On the other hand, Mr. Salmon and myself are absolutely agreed that it was *not* an albinistic specimen of any of the six species of Gulls that visit us during the winter, viz. : Black-headed, Common, Herring, Lesser Black-backed, Great Black-backed and Kittiwake. It was seen in the company of, and compared with, the first three species mentioned, when its size immediately separated it from the Black-headed and the Herring-Gulls, and although it agreed with the Common Gull in this respect, looking if anything slightly larger, its carriage, shape and flight were totally dissimilar. Confusion with the Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls and Kittiwake is also impossible on account of size and shape. It is improbable that an albino would differ from the normal in anything but colouring, but it would be expected that the beak, eyes and legs would lack colour as was the case in the two specimens mentioned as occurring off the Essex Coast and in Bridlington Bay, Yorks.

The suggestion that "April is a very unlikely time for an Ivory-Gull to visit us" is not altogether supported by previous records. A specimen was obtained in Yorkshire, April 5th, (*Brit. Birds* Vol. II., p. 329) another in Orkney April 1st (*Brit. Birds* Vol. IX., p. 28), and there are also two records from Ireland March 25th and March 27th. If nothing more had been seen of the bird after April 3rd, there would have been no doubt in my mind as to the species. Although it is extremely improbable that an Ivory-Gull would remain in this country until so late a date as June 13th, it is the only species that in any way resembles the specimen observed.

CARDIFF, *Feb.* 10th, 1922.

GEOFFREY C. S. INGRAM.