

NOTES

REED-BUNTINGS FLOCKING IN SPRING.

WITH reference to the note on the spring flocking of Reed-Buntings (*Emberiza s. schoeniclus*) (*antea*, p. 269) I came across a flock of seven or eight to-day, April 4th, near Bexhill, Sussex. There were two females in the party and all were in very bright plumage.

CHARLES G. YOUNG.

SOME BREEDING-HABITS OF THE COMMON WREN.

WITH reference to Mr. Leslie Smith's note (*antea*, p. 209), on the postponed laying of the Common Wren (*Troglodytes t. troglodytes*), I have been rather surprised that it has not called forth the record of similar experiences. As regards eccentricities none of our common species is worthier of close observation than the Wren. For many years past I have remarked that instances of postponed laying are not at all unusual. I have just looked up my notes of two such occurrences; in both I can vouch for the fact that the nest was not an old one of the previous year (for they were built on my own premises where every yard is subjected to constant scrutiny), but one nest was complete but for the feathered lining more than seven weeks before eggs were laid, and the other at least five weeks. Always, however, in my experience, the addition of the feathered lining is immediately followed by the laying of the eggs. Incubation frequently lasts a full sixteen days, and the fledging occupies from fourteen to seventeen days or longer, the young birds being ready to leave the nest earlier on disturbance. At least twice I have known a nest, which has been robbed after incubation has begun, to be used after an interval for a second attempt. In fact the liability of Wrens to desert capriciously has been greatly exaggerated. No bird is more preoccupied while building and more indifferent to observation; I have set up a camera in full view within a few feet without interrupting operations. But as the nest approaches completion it is, I think, rather a different matter, and far the greatest number of "desertions" take place at this stage; though as I have indicated some are not permanently deserted, while many are from the first experimental. When once the first egg has been laid and still more as incubation advances, no ordinary interference is likely to cause desertion.

Not so very long ago the books repeated extravagant assertions about the normal clutch of a Wren's eggs. In the first place the misstatements possibly arose from second-hand evidence about what were really Tit's eggs, but there is, too, nothing easier than to make a mistake in counting by touch only—as I have proved again and again in connection with Wren's nests. The normal clutch is in my opinion five, with six fairly common; but I have found complete clutches of three oftener than any number above six. In 1911 I found eight Wren's eggs in the rather unusual site of one of my closed nesting-boxes, and in the following year in another box seven eggs were laid—almost certainly by the same bird. It is of course possible that my own observations are insufficient to generalise about; the above, however, may serve to elicit either corroboration or refutation.

The most interesting characteristic of all—and as far as my investigations go a constant one—is the procedure of Wrens when the nestlings are first fledged. They do not, like the Swallows, return to roost in the nest at nightfall, but the parents either stow them away in any unoccupied nest of Thrush, Blackbird, Greenfinch, etc., that is handy (sometimes distributing them between two), or else—and this I have witnessed myself on two occasions—just when it is needed, the parents (I watched both together at any rate once) very hastily construct an extra nest to accommodate them. This is begun and completed in a very short time, and when ready for occupation looks exactly like a dilapidated nest at least a year old, with the back only half filled in. I twice attempted a flashlight photograph of the occupants, which was rendered perfectly possible by this gaping hole, but on each occasion the camera scared them away to other quarters. This habit I have not seen referred to in the "books," but anyone who cares to take the trouble can easily test for himself my observation.

A. H. MACHELL COX.

[Although 5 or 6 eggs probably constitute the normal clutch of the Wren and 7 eggs are less usual, there is no doubt that much larger clutches occur occasionally. I have myself found 8, and know of two locally found sets of 9. Mr. H. Massey has met with sets of 10 and 11 in his neighbourhood, and possesses a set of 14 from Ireland, while Mr. J. H. Owen records a case of 16 young being hatched off from one nest (*British Birds XIII.*, p. 82). Macgillivray also mentions instances of 16 and 17 eggs.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

SOME WINTER VISITORS TO GREAT YARMOUTH,
1921-22.

THE advent of spring seems to be a convenient time at which to record some of the less common visitors that have passed through my hands from Great Yarmouth and its vicinity during the winter months. The first spell of cold on the Continent brought the Waxwings (*Bombycilla garrulus*), the first being shot on November 9th, a Little Auk (*Alle alle*) came in the same day, and on the 16th I received three more Waxwings. On the 17th, an adult female Little Gull (*Larus minutus*) was shot near the harbour mouth, and on the 21st a Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) was picked up exhausted on the North Beach. On the 23rd, a Barnacle-Goose (*Branta leucopsis*), on the 24th six more Waxwings, and on the 29th two more were brought in. None of these upon dissection had suffered privation, on the contrary, all were fat and in fair condition and their stomachs well filled with berries. With a single exception, all were immature birds.

December 10th brought a Bean-Goose (*Anser fabalis*), a male in fair condition, weighing 7 lbs. A female Sanderling (*Crocethia alba*), in its delicate ash-grey plumage, was brought in on the 28th and a male Pink-footed Goose (*A. brachyrhynchus*) on the 29th.

On January 7th, I received another Little Auk, very thin and with an empty stomach; on the 11th, an adult male Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) was picked up starved and exhausted, on the 12th an adult male Common Scoter (*Oidemia n. nigra*) in the same condition, on the 17th another, on the 21st a Black-throated Diver (*Colymbus arcticus*) also in very poor condition, and on the 24th an adult male Smew (*M. albellus*).

The intense cold was now telling severely upon the marine species, and amongst many specimens, brought in between February 1st and 18th, were an immature female White-fronted Goose (*A. albifrons*), another male and three female Smevs, a second Black-throated Diver, two Black-necked Grebes (*Podiceps n. nigricollis*), two Red-necked Grebes (*P. g. griseigena*), a Tufted Duck (*Nyroca fuligula*), two more Common Scoters, a Golden-Eye (*Bucephala c. clangula*), two Red-breasted Mergansers (*M. serrator*), three male Sheld-Ducks (*Tadorna tadorna*) and two female Goosanders (*M. merganser*), all of them showing upon dissection evidence of having suffered great privation. The Goosanders, Smevs and Mergansers were apparently recovering their condition, having evidently found fresh water with plenty of small fish to prey upon, and all of them had full stomachs. I took

from one Merganser's stomach, eight roach of various sizes, one being nearly four inches long, and from a Goosander I took two small bream.

An immature Iceland Gull (*Larus leucopterus*), very fat and with a full stomach, was shot on the beach on February 18th, and three fine Bean-Geese fell to a punt-gun on Breydon on the 21st, while another Pink-footed Goose and Sanderling on the 28th, complete the list. E. C. SAUNDERS.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER AND BEWICK'S SWAN NEAR MANCHESTER.

THE Manchester Corporation Water Works at Audenshaw on the east, and only four miles from the centre of the City, are visited by passing migrants. Among others, an adult drake Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) was there from February 27th to March 2nd, 1922; it has been very rarely seen inland in Lancashire previously. From March 13th to 15th a Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus b. bewickii*) stayed on one of the reservoirs, and on one occasion I had an excellent view of it as it swam close in to the surrounding wall. It took one short flight while I was watching it, but, so far as I could gather from the reservoir keepers, swam in the middle of the water with some Mallards for the greater part of its stay. This water is only 17 miles from Alderley, where Mr. E. W. Hendy saw six birds in November last (*antea*, p. 212), and, in addition, Mr. F. Stubbs records (*Oldham Chronicle*, March 18th, 1922) others from Greenfield, just over the Yorkshire border on March 5th, and mentions the occurrence of birds which were probably Bewick's Swans on other reservoirs round Oldham about the same time, though these last were not identified as such by the observers. A. W. BOYD.

RED-NECKED AND SLAVONIAN GREBES IN HERTFORDSHIRE.

ON February 12th, 1922, there was a Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps griseigena*), and on the 19th a Slavonian Grebe (*P. auritus*) on one of the reservoirs at Tring. The two did not consort, and during their stay they held aloof from the Dabchicks and Great Crested Grebes. I saw both birds on several occasions up to March 9th, but failed to find the Slavonian on the 12th. The Red-neck was still on the water on March 19th, when the assumption of breeding dress was indicated by the increasing red of its neck, whilst the yellow patch at the base of the bill seemed to me to be brighter than a month before; by the 26th the bird had gone

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BLACK REDSTART IN SOMERSET.—Mr. Norman G. Hadden reports seeing a *Phœnicurus ochrurus gibraltariensis* at Porlock, on March 26th, 1922.

HOOPOE IN ABERDEENSHIRE.—Mr. W. Wilson records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1921, p. 178), that a *Upupa epops* was obtained at Clashnadarrock early in October 1921.

WRYNECK IN MIDLOTHIAN.—An example of *Jynx t. torquilla*, a very scarce passage-migrant in East Scotland, was captured on August 27th, 1921, near Musselburgh (C. Sykes, *Scot. Nat.*, 1921, p. 158.)

LITTLE OWL IN NORTHUMBERLAND.—“G. J. C.” states (*Field*, Nov. 12, 1921, p. 635) that he killed a specimen of *Athene noctua* at Bingfield on May 29th, 1919, that he is well acquainted with the bird in the south of England and that he notified the fact to Mr. Abel Chapman. We know of no recent occurrence of the Little Owl in Northumberland.

ICELAND FALCON AT SULE SKERRY.—Dr. W. Eagle Clarke states (*Scot. Nat.*, 1921, p. 185) that an adult male *Falco r. islandus* arrived on Sule Skerry (Orkney) during a north-westerly gale on January 19th, 1921. The bird was exhausted and captured.

PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN NORTH UIST.—Mr. G. Beveridge states (*Scot. Nat.*, 1921, p. 158) that a flock of forty *Anser brachyrhynchus* was seen feeding in the machar on North Uist on the evening of May 4th, 1921. They were very restless and departed the same night. Except for two birds on the Flannans in April 1911, the previous occurrence of this species in the Outer Hebrides has been doubtful.

GREAT SNIPE IN AYRSHIRE.—Mr. A. Fairbairn states (*Scot. Nat.*, 1921, p. 185) that a male *Gallinago media* was shot on September 8th, 1921, at Muirkirk.

COMMON TERN IN SCOTLAND IN WINTER.—Dr. W. E. Collinge reports (*Scot. Nat.*, 1921, p. 133), that he has received the following remarkable number of examples of *Sterna hirundo* during late autumn and winter, viz.: October 1920, eight from different parts of the east coast of Scotland; November 1920, four; December 1918, two from near Aberdeen; December 1919, one from near St. Andrews; December 1920, five from different parts of the east coast; January 1919 one and January 1920 one from near St. Andrews; February 1920, two from Aberdeen and two from near St. Andrews. Except for one of the October birds all were adults.