

NOTES

BIRD'S-NESTING MICE AND INSECTS.

As field-mice are just now approaching one of their periodic *maxima* it is to be hoped that the recent correspondence in *British Birds* will lead to the publication of further observations. I have recorded (*Ibis*, Oct. 1926, pp. 644 and 651) instances of the finding of nests of Willow-Warbler (*Phylloscopus t. trochilus*), Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa s. striata*), and Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla a. yarrellii*) in Hampshire, with teeth-marks in the egg-shells which could only have been made by a mouse of some sort, though I have not had Mr. Tickner's luck in seeing the marauder at work (see *antea*, p. 159). Probably the bank-vole (*Evotomys glareolus*: tail= $\frac{1}{2}$ body) is concerned; but it is possibly the long-tailed field-mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*), which is also common here. The short-tailed field-mouse or common vole (*Microtus agrestis*: tail= $\frac{1}{3}$ body) seems to be a non-climbing species and is probably innocent. I have also found nests of a Chaffinch (*Fringilla c. coelebs*), and a Linnet (*Carduelis c. cannabina*), in which I had expected to find eggs, empty and with the linings disarranged as described by Major Congreve; as this work was quite different from the former cases I can well believe it due to the dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*). In all these cases the attacks had been made before incubation had begun, but this year we had a nest of three-quarter fledged Great Tits (*Parus m. newtoni*) killed by some small mammal. The evidence was conclusive that the culprit was not any bird, nor a stoat, and made it very improbable that it was a weasel; in this case also I suspect the dormouse, which had formerly nested in this box. Grass-snakes have twice been caught here taking young Willow-Wrens from the nest, but they could not possibly have been involved in this case.

Neither from Messrs. Horace Donisthorpe, O. W. Richards, nor W. H. Thorpe can I get any records of insects preying upon nestlings in Britain, therefore it seems worth while to record the following cases, imperfect though most of them are. In 1924 a low-sited Linnet's nest was under observation and a week after hatching all the young were found dead, covered by a devouring swarm of small dark ants (? *Formica fusca*). Under similar circumstances in 1925 I found a family of nearly fledged Robins (*Erithacus r. melophilus*)

dead in the nest with several large, dark, flat centipedes (? *Lithobius* sp.) feeding on them. Neither of these nests had been drowned out or otherwise interfered with. Desertion at this stage is most unlikely. Supposing one parent had been killed, surely the other would have continued to feed the young through the few remaining days of fledging? Though there is no *proof* of it, I have little doubt that in both cases the young had been killed by these insects. This year I was able to watch big wood-ants (*Formica rufa*) in the act of attacking young Willow-Wrens on their tenth day in the nest. One fledgeling was lying dead about a foot from the nest and another nearer the entrance, cast out, I suppose, by their parents after death; another inside the nest was scuffling and wriggling under the first attacks of a few ants, while many more were on the two carcasses. I freed the afflicted bird as well as I could and placed the dead ones together about a foot away so as to block the trail which the ants had made to the nest; on this bait the ants concentrated and the surviving birds got safely away three days later.

T. G. LONGSTAFF.

MAGPIE AND KESTREL NESTING IN SAME TREE.

WITH reference to Mr. J. F. Thomas's note on a Magpie (*Pica p. pica*) and Kestrel (*Falco t. tinnunculus*) nesting in the same tree, I have known this happen twice in two years. On each occasion I robbed the Magpie's nest, and while the Magpie built again, a pair of Kestrels frequented the deserted nest; subsequently there was a brood of young Magpies and another of Hawks at the same time.

I have never known the species breed as close as seven feet, the nearest I can recall being about fifteen feet. But this is nothing unusual, for it is the exception rather than the rule for Magpies round Cambridge to build within ten yards of the robbed nest, be it in a thorn hedge, a line of trees, or a wood, and I have often known nests of the two species in adjacent trees.

It only proves, however, that the Magpie has no fear of the Kestrel, and, as when eggs are hatched, the Magpies, which formerly were fond of mobbing the Hawks, are now too busy feeding their own young.

G. W. THOMPSON.

[The last paragraph is probably true, so long as there is house room for both, but where nests are scarce I have known a pair of Magpies summarily ejected from a *new* nest by a pair of Kestrels.—F.C.R.J.]

HOUSE-SPARROW IN BAY OF BISCAY.

WHILE crossing the Bay of Biscay, homeward bound, on board R.M.S.P. "Arlanza" on October 17th, 1926, I saw a male House-Sparrow (*Passer d. domesticus*) on the upper deck. We were then about seventy miles S.W. of Ushant. The bird was evidently exhausted, as I was able to approach within a foot or two of it.

C. E. BAKER.

ROCK-PIPIT IN OXFORDSHIRE.

ON October 21st, 1926, while following the towpath down from Godstow to Oxford I flushed a large Pipit, which dropped again a little way ahead. It was very approachable, and when I put it up, which I did quite twenty times, it flew only a few yards on. The timbre of the single shrill note (there were Meadow-Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*) present for comparison), large size, plump build, characteristic rather stolid pose, and definite absence of any trace of white in the tail, were all repeatedly observed at close quarters and put the identification as a Rock-Pipit (that is, either *Anthus s. petrosus* or the Scandinavian *A. s. littoralis*, indistinguishable in winter) absolutely beyond doubt. I had field-glasses and took particular care owing to the *prima facie* suspicion of Water-Pipit (*A. s. spinoletta*). The Rock-Pipit is not given in Warde Fowler's list nor by Jourdain in the new *Natural History of the Oxford District*, so apparently this is the first local record. It always alighted either on the muddy margin, strewn with flotsam, or actually on floating weeds. Later, I picked up a second Rock-Pipit and watched both simultaneously. This was opposite Port Meadow, within the city of Oxford, and perhaps half a mile from the present Berkshire boundary.

E. M. NICHOLSON.

[There is a previous record of a Pipit of the *Anthus spinoletta* group, *i.e.* either a Rock or Alpine (Water) Pipit, seen by Mr. O. V. Aplin on March 22nd, 1903, at Milcombe. He notes that it did not show *pure* white in the tail and suggests that it was the Scandinavian Rock-Pipit (*A. s. littoralis*). This and another record of some race of *A. spinoletta* from Reading sewage farm are treated binomially as *A. spinoletta* in the *Natural History of the Oxford District*.—F.C.R.J.]

CUCKOO REARED BY COMMON WRENS.

ON July 20th, 1926, at Zell, near Biberach, in the Black Forest of Germany, I found a three-parts-grown young Cuckoo (*Cuculus c. canorus*) on the ground under the nest of a Common

Wren (*Troglodytes t. troglodytes*). The Cuckoo was not old enough to have travelled any distance. The nest was placed against the trunk of a twenty-year-old silver fir, being supported at the bottom by a persistent branch, and felted round another dead branch five or six inches higher up. The opening of the nest, though large, was not actually damaged, and the dome was complete. I waited and one of the Wrens returned and fed the Cuckoo. G. W. THOMPSON.

ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARDS AND HEN-HARRIER IN DENBIGHSHIRE.

I HAVE recently examined two examples of the Rough-legged Buzzard (*Buteo l. lagopus*) sent in to Shrewsbury for preservation. Both were obtained on the Denbighshire moors near Wrexham—the eastern end of the same moorlands on which the six examples preserved at Rûg, described in my *Vertebrate Fauna of North Wales* (p. 226), were taken. The first was an adult female trapped on November 9th, 1926; the second an adult male—possibly its mate—shot on the 22nd.

Incidentally, I may add that an immature male Hen-Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) was obtained on the same moor on November 13th. H. E. FORREST.

INCUBATION OF THE BLACK STORK.

REFERRING to Major Congreve's communication on this subject (*antea*, p. 179), it should be noted that in his interesting monograph "Den sorte Stork" (Viborg, 1920), Mr. P. Skovgaard states, from observation in Denmark (p. 21), "The mates brood alternately."

Regarding the period of incubation, Mr. Skovgaard's remarks may be translated as follows:—"As looking too often at the nest during the earliest period is attended with the greatest risk of driving away the bird, I have in the meantime contented myself with the extremes which my observations hitherto have given. The duration of the incubation-period is about 40 days. The longest, May 4th to June 19th=46 days, and the shortest, May 15th to June 19th=35 days." P. G. RALFE.

[The duration as given by Hørring (32-38 days) was quoted by Skovgaard in the book mentioned above and is probably more accurate than those here mentioned, as both periods quoted by Mr. Ralfe refer to estimates made on the same nest and should read that in the case of one nest the eggs were laid between May 4th and May 19th (when the nest contained four eggs) while the young were hatched by June 19th, so that the period was something between 35 and 46 days.—F.C.R.J.]

SPOONBILLS IN BEDFORDSHIRE.

THREE Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) visited the Ouse meadows at Renhold in 1916 and one of the trio was unfortunately shot on March 24th by a local farmer, and one through whom I obtained confirmation of their occurrence. This bird was subsequently purchased in the flesh for seventy-five shillings by the local taxidermist and collector, the late Mr. A. S. Covington, who also advised me of this specimen being in his possession. For obvious reasons of the law I was requested by him to suppress the recording of the same at the time, but now, owing to his death in 1925, I feel I am at liberty to publish this, the first known instance of the species visiting the county.

J. S. ELLIOTT.

CORMORANT IN NORTH DERBYSHIRE.

A CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax c. carbo*) appeared on the lake in the Buxton Gardens on November 20th, 1926. It was in immature plumage and allowed me to get within five yards of it. The lake is a small piece of water situated among streets and houses. At the time, the weather was misty, glass very low and wind S.W. Cormorants are of rare occurrence in Derbyshire and are generally observed in the south of the county along the Trent valley. As far as I know, it has never been reported from the Peak district.

WILLIAM SHIPTON.

[There are about half a dozen records of Cormorants from Derbyshire, but all are from the Trent or Dove Valleys, and we have no previous records of this species from the High Peak.—F.C.R.J.]

STORM-PETREL IN SHROPSHIRE.

ON November 10th, 1926, a Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) was found dead beneath telegraph wires at Donnington, near Newport, Salop. This species is much rarer in Shropshire than Leach's Petrel. It occurs only when storm-driven in winter, as in the present instance; but, as an exception, Beckwith records one caught alive near Wenlock on July 15th, 1886, the weather for some time having been fine and calm.

H. E. FORREST.

OYSTER-CATCHERS INLAND IN CHESHIRE.

OF the common waders the Oyster-Catcher (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*) is by far the least often seen in inland localities in Cheshire and until this year I had only seen it once—at Rostherne Mere, on May 10th, 1914.

During 1926, however, I have twice seen one at Marbury Mere, near Northwich—on June 22nd and December 5th.

There are published three earlier records from the Northwich district—all of single birds:—

December 4th, 1904 (*Fauna of Cheshire*), March 31st, 1916, and March 31st, 1917 (*Lanc. and Ches. Fauna Committee Reports*)—the first two also at Marbury Mere and the third a mile distant.

A. W. BOYD.

GREY PHALAROPE IN CORNWALL.

WHILE fishing off the south coast of Cornwall, near Fowey, in August, 1926, a Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) came and swam round the boat. We were about a mile from the land, and a shore breeze was bringing myriads of winged ants seaward. The Phalarope was perfectly tame and was busy feeding on the ants blown on to the surface of the sea.

E. LE BRETON MARTIN.

KITTIWAKE GULL RINGED IN FARNE ISLANDS REPORTED FROM LABRADOR.

A SECOND Kittiwake Gull (*Rissa t. tridactyla*) ringed in the Farne Islands, Northumberland, has been reported from the other side of the Atlantic.

In March last, Mr. George Budgell, officer in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's Post at Rigolet, on the Hamilton Inlet, Labrador, wrote to inform me that a customer of the Hudson Bay Company had shot a bird in the previous "fall" with a ring stamped Witherby, High Holborn, London, and numbered 70450. I wrote to Mr. Budgell for further particulars and for the return of the ring if he could possibly obtain it. I have now heard from Mr. Budgell in a letter dated October 21st, 1926, as follows:—

"This bird was shot on October 28th, 1925, at Tikkoraluk, Gross Water Bay, Labrador, about fifteen miles distant from the Hudson's Bay Company Post, at Rigolet. The person who shot this bird has moved from Tikkoraluk, and I hardly expect to see him until January. I shall then try to get the ring from him, and shall forward same as soon as possible after receipt."

As a ring with this number was put on a nestling Kittiwake by Mrs. T. E. Hodgkin on June 30th, 1924, at the Farne Islands, I think we can without hesitation accept the record as correct, though the receipt of the ring, if Mr. Budgell is able to obtain it, will be an interesting confirmation.

It is certainly very curious that the previous Kittiwake reported from Newfoundland was ringed by Mr. A. C. Greg in the previous year, also at the Farne Islands (see *Brit. Birds*,

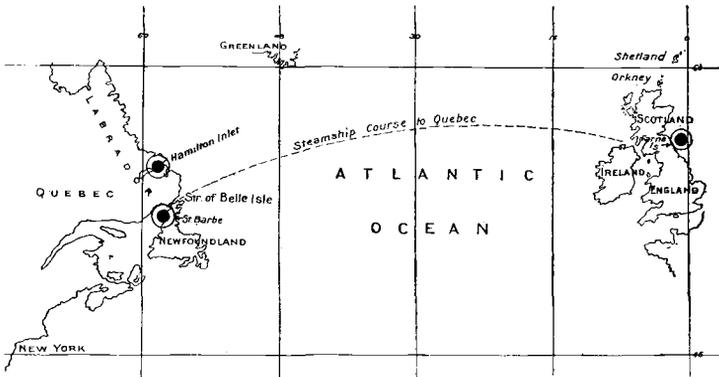
XVIII., p. 262, and XIX., p. 18). The details of the two records are as follows:—

Ringed.

- 67423 Farne Islands, as
nestling, June 28th, 1923,
by Mr. A. C. Greg.
70450 Farne Islands, as
nestling, June 30th, 1924,
by Mrs. T. E. Hodgkin.

Reported.

- Horse Island, St. Barbe,
Newfoundland, Aug. 12th
1924, by Mr. L. Curtis.
Grosswater Bay, Hamilton
Inlet, Labrador, Oct. 28th,
1925, by Mr. G. Budgell.



It would be mere supposition to suggest how or why these birds travelled from our east coast to the Atlantic, or once there why they crossed the ocean to Canada. We know they follow ships often for a very great distance and this may be to some extent an explanation, but that two birds in two different years should have been discovered to have made this remarkable journey points to something more regular than mere chance. The breeding range of our bird is almost circumpolar as it extends eastward from Alaska across Canada to Greenland, Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemlia, while in east Siberia, Bering Sea and Alaska it is replaced by another subspecies *Rissa t. pollicaris*. When, therefore, these Farne Island birds reached the neighbourhood of Newfoundland they would encounter other members of their own race. Whether these birds would ever return or would breed with the Canadian stock and thus make another case of what Dr. Landsborough Thomson has called abmigration, is a question which may yet be decided by ringing.

Meanwhile, we are very grateful to Mr. Budgell for bringing this interesting case to light and for taking so much trouble to obtain the necessary particulars. H. F. WITHERBY.

NORTHERN GUILLEMOT IN SOMERSET.

IT is quite usual after September gales to find many dead Guillemots washed up on the coast of Somerset. For several years I have wondered at the difference in the colour of the plumage of the birds picked up, and last year I identified, beyond much doubt, with the help of the *Practical Handbook*, several of them as belonging to the Northern form *Uria a. aalge*. On September 15th, 1926, out of seven so found by F. H. L. Whish and myself, four were undoubtedly *Uria a. aalge*, the black upper-parts contrasting greatly with the mouse-colour of the others; and several subsequently found by myself have been of this Northern form, proving apparently that it occurs more frequently on this coast than *Uria a. albionis*.

STANLEY LEWIS.

WATER-RAILS EATING APPLES.

THE Rev. L. Wynne, Rector of Warnford, Hants, who is a very keen ornithologist, tells me that in his orchard, which is close to a stream and watercress beds, the Water-Rails (*Rallus a. aquaticus*) fly up into his apple trees and peck at apples and, when they fall, finish them on the ground. Jays (*Garrulus g. rufitergum*) are also a pest. Mr. Wynne caught six Water-Rails and released them, but the same birds return and have become tame. They still peck fallen apples.

M. PORTAL.

[The same habit has been recorded of the Moorhen (*Gallinula ch. chloropus*), see *Zool.*, 1866, p. 33; R. T. Tomes, *Vict. Hist. of Worcester*, Vol. I., and *Br. Birds*, X., p. 251.—F.C.R.J.]

NESTLING PLUMAGES OF THE INDIAN STONECHAT AND PRATINCOLE.—In the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (August, 1926), Dr. C. B. Ticehurst has a paper on the down plumages of some Indian Birds. Amongst them those of the Indian Stonechat and the Pratincole, which are not given in the *Practical Handbook*, are described as follows:—

Saxicola torquata indica: Down long, plentiful, pale grey; Distribution, supraorbital, occipital, humeral and spinal tracts. No tongue spots.

Glareola p. pratincola: Head, wings and back grizzled dark brown and pale buff, with medium dark line down crown; under-parts pale buff.

LATE SWALLOWS IN HAMPSHIRE, SUSSEX AND SUFFOLK.—In the *Practical Handbook*, autumn records of Swallows (*Hirundo r. rustica*) have been located as within the normal range of date up to the third week of November. The number of those that linger on migration after the middle of October naturally varies within wide limits from year to year, but, judging by the frequent notices in the daily press, the numbers in 1926 would appear to have been considerably above the average. Mr. Richmond E. Paton now writes that he saw one at Christchurch, Hants, on November 24th, and on the same day one was seen on the River Waveney, on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk, just above Bungay, by Mr. E. J. Hunt; while Mr. H. W. Finlinson reports one from Lancing College, Sussex, on December 6th.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER BREEDING IN SUTHERLAND.—Mr. E. G. Paterson records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1926, p. 92) that a pair of *Dryobates major* reared a brood of five at Bal Blair, Invershin, in 1926. The nest was found on May 29th with young almost able to fly. The extension of this bird as a breeding-species in Scotland in recent years has been remarkable. In 1924, extensions were recorded for Fifeshire, Morayshire and east Inverness-shire (*cf. antea*, p. 111), while the authors of the Scottish Report in 1925 give further evidence of its spreading, records coming from Ayrshire, Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and east Inverness-shire (*Scot. Nat.*, 1926, p. 74). Except as a migrant (probably of the northern form), we believe the bird was previously unknown in Sutherlandshire.

SCOPS OWL IN SHETLAND.—An Owl, which has been identified by the authorities of the Royal Scottish Museum, where it now is, as *Otus s. scops*, was found dead on the island of Foula on May 10th, 1926, and reported by Mr. W. H. Greenaway (*Scot. Nat.*, 1926, p. 68).

WHITE NESTLING SNIPE.—With reference to the note on two white nestlings of the Common Snipe (*Capella g. gallinago*) in north Lancashire (*antea*, p. 79), Mr. H. W. Robinson informs us that a pure white bird of the year was shot in the neighbouring county of Westmorland during the first week in September, which he suggests may have belonged to the same brood, as it had no ring upon its leg. He states that it had dark eyes, and enquires if any pure white Snipe have been real albinos with pink eyes before going through the taxidermist's hands, for his experience is that practically all have dark eyes.