

## AUTUMN MOVEMENTS OF JACK SNIPE AND OTHER BIRDS OBSERVED ON A CHESHIRE SEWAGE-FARM.

BY  
T. A. COWARD.

AUTUMNAL passage movements of the Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) are described as from mid-September to the end of November in the *Practical Handbook*, and August 12th and 20th are given as early dates. With the exception of one bird reported in early August my Cheshire experiences of this species agreed with this until the autumn or summer of 1926. In *British Birds* (Vol. XX., p. 133) two early dates for 1926 were recorded, a bird shot on Dartmoor on August 3rd, and one seen in Wigtonshire on August 6th. Apparently there was an unusually early immigration or passage of the birds at this time. Not only did the Jack Snipe appear earlier but in very much larger numbers than I have before seen in Cheshire. Mr. N. Neave reported to me that he had seen one near Rainow on July 25th, and on July 30th I found one amongst a large number of Common Snipe (*Capella g. gallinago*) on the Altrincham sewage-farm.

In connection with the early appearance and numbers of Jack Snipe which I observed, it may be of interest to give a few details of the fluctuations of other species. Black-headed Gulls are usually plentiful on and around the tanks, but on July 30th I counted thirty-five Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*), all immature. A little party of four Common Sandpipers and six Ringed Plovers were on one tank, and all over the farm were large numbers of Lapwings, Yellow and Pied Wagtails, and Linnets, and at least one White Wagtail (*Motacilla a. alba*). During the next three weeks I paid several visits to the farm, but did not see any Jack Snipe, though Common Snipe were plentiful, and especially numerous on August 17th.

On August 5th the numbers of Gulls had increased, there being at least fifty Lesser Black-backs. On the 12th a fair number of Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*) had joined the other waders, and with them was a Sanderling (*Crocethia alba*); it was still there on the 14th, when there was also a single Curlew-Sandpiper (*C. testacea*).

On the 14th I could see only thirty Lesser Black-backs, but on the 21st I counted eighty-eight, and many were mature birds. Three Green Sandpipers (*Tringa ochropus*) were on one tank, and everywhere Sand-Martins and Swallows were feeding about the tanks and fields.

On August 24th, Redshanks, Dunlins and Ringed Plovers had increased in numbers, Common Snipe were more numerous than I had seen them, whisps rising everywhere that I went, and on one tank I found between fifteen and twenty Jack Snipe. I could not be sure of the actual number for the tank, which had been ploughed, was only partially flooded, and birds kept appearing from the furrows; I counted twelve visible at one moment, and others appeared and disappeared amongst the clods. These Jacks were not nervous, remaining sleeping or feeding long after all the Common Snipe had taken alarm; when at last I put them up they flew low to near-by tanks. On this date I put up four Teal (*Anas c. crecca*).

Redshanks, Dunlins and Ringed Plovers were in even larger numbers on the 26th, and I disturbed twenty-one Teal, but apparently some of the Jack Snipe had passed on, for I could find no more than half a dozen. On my next visit, on the 28th, I could not see a single Jack, and all the Ringed Plovers seemed to have left. The Dunlins were reduced to six, and the Redshanks to three, an unusually small number; many Lesser Black-backs had departed, for whereas on the 26th I counted seventy-seven, I could make out no more than twenty-one on the 28th.

My next visit was on September 8th, when not a single large Gull remained, and the Black-heads were considerably reduced in numbers. But other birds had come in, for Lapwings and Redshanks were again numerous, and with the latter was a Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), the only one that I saw that season. Common Snipe were still abundant, and with them were eleven Jacks, the last that I saw. Other birds on that date were four or five Dunlin, a Ringed Plover and a very sleepy Sanderling. Wagtails, Pied and Yellow, were again passing in large numbers, and I saw one male Blue-headed Wagtail (*M. flava*). On the 10th a Little Stint (*C. minuta*) was with a rather larger group of Ringed Plovers and Dunlins and the same Sanderling.

I could not visit the farm again until after my return from abroad, but on October 8th there were no waders present except Common Snipe, Redshanks and Lapwings, and they were not specially numerous.

As a rule the first records of Jack Snipe are of birds that have been shot, and it may be that passage in late July and early August has been overlooked before the shooting season has begun. Those who have opportunity of watching sewage-farms should look out for the early arrival of this bird.