

NOTES

HOUSE-SPARROW FEEDING NESTLING SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS.

A PAIR of Spotted Flycatchers (*Muscicapa s. striata*) had built a nest and hatched four young ones this year in a climbing rose, under a window of a house in Somersetshire. One very wet day I heard a great fluttering and a House-Sparrow (*Passer d. domesticus*) chirping loudly. On looking out I saw one Flycatcher holding on to the wing of a hen Sparrow, which was trying to escape, while the other Flycatcher, with its beak full of flies, looked on. The Sparrow flew off at last, and the young ones were fed by the parents who returned fairly frequently. After about twenty minutes the Sparrow returned, flew straight to the nest, fed the young Flycatchers and flew off, and this went on all the morning. *The Sparrow took longer to find food than the parents.* At first, if they found her at the nest they were very agitated and perched a yard or two off, making harsh little noises, but as the day went on they grew quieter and by the evening waited calmly till she had finished feeding and then took their turn. I could not see what flies the Sparrow brought. Twice during the afternoon she got on to the nest and seemed to be trying to cover the little ones from the pouring rain.

I left the place next day, but I had time to see that the three birds, apparently on the best of terms, were still feeding the young ones.

FRANCES POWELL.

INCREASE OF GREY WAGTAIL IN KENT.

THE Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla c. cinerea*), first found nesting near Maidstone in 1921 (Vol. XVII., p. 23), is increasing, not only nesting in its usual places in that district, but also within three hundred yards of my house. This pair is an "extra pair," as it makes four pairs that nested in 1927.

JAMES R. HALE.

PIED WAGTAIL WITH THREE BROODS.

THE Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla a. yarrellii*) is known as a regular double-brooded bird. This year, for the first time in my experience, I have found a bird having a third nest after raising two broods. Her first brood consisted of six. In the second nest there were six eggs which all hatched. This nest was in a stack of straw and unfortunately a workman, not noticing the nest, upset it, but seeing the young roll down he

made a hollow in the side of the stack and placed four of the young in it, not seeing the other two. These four were brought up all right by the parents. In July the birds made a third nest in the same stack and now the hen is sitting on five eggs.

J. H. OWEN.

[In the *Prac. Handbook*, I., p. 208, I stated that two broods were usually reared, "sometimes three." Instances of the latter are recorded by E. H. Rodd (*Zool.* 1878, p. 28); by Lt.-Col. E. A. Butler (*Zool.* 1903, p. 313), and by E. G. B. Meade-Waldo (*British Birds*, II., p. 130). Probably most of the August nests occasionally met with are third broods.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

WATER-PIPIT IN DORSET.

IN *British Birds*, Vol. XIX., p. 22, I recorded the occurrence of a Water-Pipit (*Anthus s. spinoletta*) at Weymouth on April 4th and 6th, 1925. On March 19th, 1926, I saw a single bird in exactly the same spot as in 1925, and on March 20th two in the same place. These were observed up to March 29th. On April 2nd, 1927, I saw another bird within a mile of the same spot. After looking through a series of skins of *A. s. spinoletta* and *A. s. littoralis*, both from a private collection and in the British Museum—though it must be admitted that extreme types of the latter (if correctly named) much resemble the former—I have come to the conclusion that the Weymouth birds were certainly examples of *A. s. spinoletta* for the following reasons:—The under-parts were quite unmarked with any spots or streaks, a lot of white was sometimes displayed in the tail during flight, and the broad white eye-stripe was *very conspicuous indeed*. All the birds were in breeding plumage. I may add that I watched the birds at close range with strong prism glasses. This apparently regular spring migration of this species along the Dorset coast does not seem to have been yet recorded.

F. L. BLATHWAYT.

MARSH-WARBLER IN DEVON.

ON May 26th, 1925, and five subsequent days, by an estuary in south-east Devon, I had the good fortune to study at close range a Marsh-Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*). I sat about ten yards away while the bird poured forth its astonishing song, literally by the hour, with very few breaks. One spell of song lasted for fifteen minutes without a single pause, and during the six days, on one of which my wife was with me, I heard clear imitations of no less than nineteen species. Several times I had a good view of the hen, and confidently expected to find the nest.

Unfortunately, on June 1st I had to go away, and when I was able to revisit the spot on June 15th there was no sign of the Marsh-Warblers. What had happened during my absence I do not know. Since then, I regret to say, they have not reappeared.

This is, so far as I am aware, the first recorded instance of the Marsh-Warbler in Devon. W. WALMESLEY WHITE.

MARSH-WARBLER NESTING IN KENT.

IN Vol. XX., p. 74, I recorded the breeding of the Marsh-Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*) in the Medway Valley in 1926. In 1927 it has again nested near Maidstone in almost the same place. This bird is certainly on the increase.

JAMES R. HALE.



UN-DOMED WILLOW-WARBLER'S NEST.

ON May 16th, 1927, in company with Capt. A. W. Boyd, a nest was found in a Buxton wood that we considered was sufficiently uncommon to warrant its being recorded.

It was the nest of a Willow-Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), constructed under a stone, with the usual outer building

material of dry grass and generous lining of small feathers, but without the customary dome. Instead, the stone served as an effective roofing. Four days later, when the photograph was taken, the nest contained fully-fledged young and was much more open and conspicuous than on our previous visit.

JOHN ARMITAGE.

[I found an exactly similar nest in East Finmark in 1901.—N.F.T.]

[Nests of the Willow-Warbler have been occasionally recorded from among rocks. See *Birds of Yorkshire*, I., p. 85; also in a hole in a wall, two feet from the ground (*Zool.* 1892, p. 112). Mr. W. S. Medicott has also recorded a Wood-Warbler's nest in a rabbit burrow which was not domed (*British Birds*, II., p. 380).—F.C.R.J.]

BLACKBIRD AND SONG-THRUSH LAYING TOGETHER.

ON April 11th, 1927, I found at Linton, Kent, a nest of a Blackbird (*Turdus m. merula*) containing two Blackbird's eggs and four of a Song-Thrush (*T. ph. clarkei*); on April 14th the nest contained three Blackbird's and four Song-Thrush's eggs.

On May 3rd the nest held three young Blackbirds and two Song-Thrush's eggs which, on examination, appeared to be infertile.

I was able to visit the nest only on the three occasions mentioned, and, unfortunately, I did not see an adult bird actually at the nest, but, whilst I was there on May 3rd, a Song-Thrush continually uttered its alarm note, and generally behaved in such a way as to lead me to believe that it was acting as parent to the brood.

WALLACE WOOD.

LARGE CLUTCHES OF ROBIN'S EGGS.

FOUR to six is the recognized number of eggs to find in the nest of a Robin (*Erithacus r. melophilus*), but as many as seven is not really rare. On two occasions I have found nine. In the first case, many years ago, the eggs might be divided into three sets of three; these differed so much in appearance as to seem like the produce of three different birds, although I am strongly of the opinion that they were all laid by one bird. Unfortunately, the nest was destroyed by vermin before I could be absolutely certain, but I only saw two Robins near the nest, which was in a very lonely lane in Shropshire. In 1916 a Robin laid nine eggs in a nest in the ivy round the

back door of Old School House at Felsted. These were all absolutely alike and were almost spherical. Five were infertile, one chick died in the shell and three young were reared. In 1927 I found two Robins laying in the same nest in a straw stack at Ley Priory; each laid five eggs and then one bird held possession of the nest. J. H. OWEN.

[In addition to the two cases of nine eggs reported by Mr. Owen, four other instances are known to me, one of which is recorded in *British Birds*, VIII., p. 74. The late E. B. Dunlop Smith found a clutch of ten eggs at Windermere, and twelve eggs in one nest (probably by two hens) were reported by Miss B. Johnson to the Carlisle Ent. and N. H. Soc. in 1895.—F.C.R.J.]

BRENT GOOSE IN ANTRIM IN JUNE.

ON June 26th, 1927, I saw two Brent Geese (*Branta bernicla*) swimming in the sea near Carnlough, co. Antrim. I had with me Mr. C. B. Horsburgh, a well-known Ulster naturalist, and another companion, a keen wild-fowler, and we all identified the birds. Through my binoculars we could see the white "ring" marks on the neck. We were all surprised at seeing Brent Geese at this time of the year, as the species had left Strangford Lough (co. Down), where we usually find them in the winter, at least six weeks before.

R. L. HENDERSON.

EIDER IN CARNARVONSHIRE IN JUNE.

As there does not appear to be any record of the occurrence of the Eider (*Somateria m. mollissima*) in Carnarvonshire, it may be worth noting that on June 11th, 1927, I had under observation a fine drake which was resting on a low, half-submerged rock at the foot of the Great Orme's Head. I got to within fifty yards of the bird and had a splendid view of it through my binoculars, noting its main characters—black under-parts, tail and crown, white back, neck and throat with greenish stripes on its neck, creamy breast and straight forehead and bill. With the object of ascertaining whether the bird was in some way disabled I purposely disturbed it from the rock. It dropped heavily on the water and paddled quickly out to sea, only, however, to return to the same rock within a quarter of an hour. It was certainly less nervous than other ducks and did not object to the presence of a grey seal which put its head out of the water quite close to the bird.

RICHARD W. JONES.

[Two Eiders were recorded as seen in Colwyn Bay on March 15th, 1913, *vide* Vol. VII., p. 23.—EDS.]

FULMAR BREEDING IN DURHAM.

ON July 17th, 1927, I saw a Fulmar (*Fulmarus g. glacialis*) brooding a nestling, still in down, on the cliffs at Marsden, near South Shields. For some time Fulmars have been frequenting Marsden Bay and occasionally Frenchman's Bay, which is a little further up the coast. Though a resident informs me that they were here three seasons ago, this is the first proof available of their actually breeding here.

Last year (1926) the largest number of Fulmars I saw was about twelve in June, but as nine were reported to have been shot in mid-July and the last seen was on July 22nd, it is doubtful whether any young could have been reared.

This year (1927) on February 9th a hen with a well-developed ovary was brought to me and was said to be one of four at Marsden. The largest number seen this year was on May 1st, when eight were seen at Frenchman's and fourteen at Marsden. One pair was seen mating (May 1st), though the majority seemed to be non-breeding birds. On July 17th, when the young one was seen, only four or five others still remained.

C. NOBLE ROLLIN.

INCREASE OF GREAT CRESTED GREBE IN KENT.

WITH reference to my note on the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps c. cristatus*) nesting in Kent (Vol. XIV., p. 44), it is more than holding its own near Maidstone. In 1927 twenty-one birds were seen before they started nesting. A pair which I call the "original pair" had a full clutch of eggs in the first week in April. This nest was out in the open near the bank with no attempt at concealment. As far as I can judge, eight pairs nested this year. On this piece of water no Wild Duck has been known successfully to rear its young, the pike destroying the ducklings, but the young Grebes survive! I should be glad to know how they manage to escape from the pike.

JAMES R. HALE.

[The Great Crested Grebe was recorded as having nested for the first time in Eastwell Park in 1919 and it was reported in the *Kentish Express* (1.ix.23) that two broods were reared in 1923. On April 26th, 1927, I found six pairs on the water. Two birds were sitting on nests, each within a few yards only of the bank, one sheltered by an overhanging willow, the other without cover of any kind. The latter bird and nest were most conspicuous and could be seen from a great distance.—N. F. TICEHURST.]

BEHAVIOUR OF NESTING BIRDS IN FLOODS.

WITH reference to Mr. Owen's note on the behaviour of nesting birds in floods (*antea*, p. 46), the following case may be of interest.

In May, 1924, I found in Holland a nest of a Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa l. limosa*), with four eggs, on a tussock of grass in a small pool of shallow water. During some days there was a great fall of rain and the water rose considerably, but when visiting the nest again I found it built up several inches and the eggs quite dry and warm.

The nest contained then only three eggs, but the fourth was found below the new material on the old bottom.

Later on the water went down again and the nest was then at least eight inches above the surface. FR. HAVERSCHMIDT.

WOODCOCK NESTING IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

WITH reference to my note in Vol. XX., p. 26, the Woodcock (*Scolopax r. rusticola*) has again been found nesting in north Buckinghamshire. A nest of four eggs was discovered in Ravenstone Wood this spring by wood-cutters. Unfortunately, it was reported later by the keeper that the eggs had been "eaten by mice." H. L. COCHRANE.

EARLY NESTING OF WOODCOCK IN
NORTHUMBERLAND.

WE found the first sitting Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) at Alnwick on March 18th, 1927. This is two days earlier than the previous recorded date for this district. H. L. McLEAN.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPES IN NORFOLK IN
SUMMER.

ALTHOUGH a few Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) pass through north Norfolk in the early autumn, I have not heard of a spring or summer record during the last fifteen years or more. A pair, however, turned up in the Salthouse Marshes on June 5th, 1927, and stayed two days.

CLIFFORD BORRER.

SANDWICH TERN BREEDING ON NORTH
RONALDSHAY.

ON page 704 of Vol. II. of *A Practical Handbook of British Birds*, under Sandwich Tern (*Sterna s. sandvicensis*), there occurs this footnote:—

"The Rev. J. R. Hale informs us that it breeds on Sanday and not North Ronaldshay, as stated in Saunders's *Manual*."

The statement in Howard Saunders's *Manual* is, however, correct, and refers to the discovery, on North Ronaldshay, of a small colony of Sandwich Terns, which the late Allan Briggs and myself found breeding there in 1893. There were, in all, eleven nests—one containing three eggs and the remainder two each. I should be glad, if it is possible, to have this correction made in future editions, as I believe that this was the first known colony in the Orkney Islands.

A. H. MEIKLEJOHN.

[We are glad to publish the above, or, indeed, any other correction of statements in the *Handbook*. Mr. Hale informs us that there was a very large colony of Sandwich Terns in Sanday in 1910 and as far as he could discover (though it is possible to have overlooked a small number) none in North Ronaldshay. Mr. Hale has, however, recently been informed by a friend that in 1925 the Sandwich Tern was not nesting in Sanday and may possibly have moved to North Ronaldshay, though as to that he has no evidence. The bird is well known to be capricious with regard to its breeding places and we regret to have made the statement, as it is evident that it has bred in both islands.—EDS.]

LITTLE TERN IN WORCESTERSHIRE.

ON June 1st, 1927, a Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) was hawking over the River Severn near Dowles Church. This is the first time I have observed this species in twenty-four years' residence in this parish.

J. S. ELLIOTT.

[R. F. Tomes (*Vict. Hist. of Worcester*) records specimens seen both on the Severn and Avon, and states that he has examples shot on the Avon. This species was also recorded near Cofton Hackett in 1885, but is evidently a rare straggler to the county.—F.C.R.J.]

MOORHEN INCUBATING PARTRIDGE EGGS.

IN a ditch-bank by the roadside, near Haddington, a Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) began nesting. When she had laid eleven eggs she was evicted by a Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) which deposited her seven eggs amongst those of the Partridge. The gamekeeper wanted the Partridge eggs for setting but gave the Waterhen time to bring them near hatching. When he went to lift the Partridge eggs he found the Waterhen dead in the nest. Both the Waterhen's eggs and those of the Partridge had well-developed chicks. The gamekeeper showed me the remains of the nest when I happened to call on him on June 20th.

WILLIAM SERLE.

IMMIGRATION OF CROSSBILLS.—From information we have received from several correspondents, it seems likely that the immigration of Crossbills this year may prove to be of unusual magnitude, as happens periodically. With a view to recording the movement adequately, we shall be glad if readers will send in notes of any Crossbills seen by them, giving particulars as to localities, numbers, dates, length of stay, food and, if possible, a comparison with immigrations in previous years.—EDS.

BLACKBIRD WITH DEFORMED BILL.—Mr. J. Bartholomew writes that he found a recently fledged Blackbird (*Turdus m. merula*) on June 4th, 1927, near Glasgow, which had no upper mandible and was blind of the right eye. There was no sign of a recent injury and the bird was in good condition, still being fed by its parents. No doubt such deformed individuals occur from time to time in many species but do not survive after the parents cease feeding them.

CUCKOO RETURNING TO SAME SUMMER QUARTERS FOR NINTH SUCCESSIVE YEAR.—Major Van De Weyer writes that the Cuckoo (*Cuculus c. canorus*) with the peculiar broken note reported in Vols. XVI., p. 107; XVIII., p. 30; XIX., p. 30; XX., p. 132, returned to Hungerford Park for the ninth successive year on May 12th, 1927.