

# NOTES

## BARK-STRIPPING BY ROOKS.

THE reason for small bare branches on lime trees has always mystified me. But having lime trees on my lawn, close in front of the house, which are used by Rooks, I have found they habitually strip bark off and use it for lining. I have seen a strip laid like a leather binding to the inside of the nest. The only other tree besides lime which I have noticed so used is the tulip tree.

Another noticeable thing is the snippets of elm leaves which strew the lawn at the end of May. This, I take it, is the work of young Rooks experimenting with their beaks as scissors.

E. PEAKE.

FIVE or six years ago I saw some Rooks tearing bark from a lime tree quite near to the Royal Pavilion Rookery at Brighton.

CAMERON SHORE.

## THE COLOUR OF THE SOFT PARTS OF THE STARLING.

AN examination of the soft parts of a series of 194 Starlings (*Sturnus v. vulgaris*) over a period of twelve months, with the exception of the month of August, reveals one or two points of interest. In all, 112 males and 84 females were examined.

A study of several standard text books and coloured plates of the species would seem to indicate that the true colour of the beak has escaped notice, and the fact of a definite difference in the two sexes in the breeding-season does not appear to have been recorded, this, by the way, being a far more obvious external indication of sex than is the colour of the iris at this season.

During the breeding-season adult males can at once be distinguished from adult females by the fact that the base of the bill is of a pure French-grey colour, contrasting markedly with the rest which is lemon-yellow. No male yet examined was found to have a uniform lemon yellow beak. In the upper mandible the grey is equal in extent to about the proximal  $\frac{1}{2}$ , while in the lower mandible its extent is about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the total length. It should be noted also that the gape in males at this season is of a deep grey hue.

In the females during the breeding-season the beak may be uniform lemon-yellow, less bright than in the male, but

more often than not that part of the beak which in the male is grey, in the female is of a delicate flesh-pink. The gape is whitish-flesh.

During the moult in late summer and in the autumn the beak becomes suffused with dark olive-green and brown until the uniform dark slate-grey beak of winter is assumed, though nearly always the cutting edges remain whitish.

From winter back to the breeding-season again is characterised by the gradual replacement of the slate-grey colour by yellowish-white, green and brown, to the lemon-yellow of the bird's nuptial dress.

The tarsi of all birds after the assumption of first winter plumage were of a reddish-brown colour, varying in intensity from a vivid light chestnut to a dark red-brown. In the breeding-season the feet appear greyish owing to the fact that the scutellæ are margined with grey.

The males have rich brown irides, but not invariably so, for four birds, all adults in winter plumage, possessed typical female irides. This was verified not only from fresh shot specimens but also from the live bird.

In one or two females the light periphery was either incomplete or lacking in intensity.

Juveniles of adult proportions have dark slate-grey beaks with whitish cutting edges; before assuming mature size the upper mandible is brownish and the lower yellowish as in the nestling. The tarsi of juveniles are brownish with a distinct purplish flesh tint.

The irides of juveniles are sometimes of the rich brown colour seen in males, sometimes of a mouse-brown hue, much the same tint as the plumage of the head and neck, and at times a stone-grey colour. A sexual distinction was not constantly noted, but males, if anything, inclined to the rich brown colour, and females to the mouse-brown and stone-grey.

Juveniles moulting into the first winter: beaks as for juveniles. Irides as in adults. Tarsi also as in adult birds, a change which seems to occur even when only one or two feathers of the first winter dress are showing.

First summer birds have soft parts as in adults but less vivid, many individuals having the beak much shaded with greenish or brown.

JAMES M. HARRISON.

#### EARLY NESTING OF TREE-PIBIT AND LAND-RAIL IN CUMBERLAND.

ON April 26th, 1928, a Land-Rail (*Crex crex*) was heard craking in a small two-year-old larch plantation in north

Cumberland, and on the evening of May 3rd a Land-Rail, probably the female, was flushed from a nest of one egg, whilst on the 11th there were nine eggs, the clutch well hidden in a clump of coarse grass. The male continued craking until the clutch was laid.

In this same plantation on May 8th a Tree-Pipit (*Anthus t. trivialis*) was flushed from a nest of six eggs. R. H. BROWN.

[Clutches of the Tree-Pipit have been recorded from Suffolk on May 6th, 1912, and Shropshire on May 7th, 1903.—F.C.R.J.]

#### WILLOW-TIT IN DEVON.

ON May 1st, 1928, near Woodbury Village in south-east Devon, I had for some time a pair of British Willow-Tits (*Parus atricapillus kleinschmidti*) under close observation within a dozen yards. The differences between this species and the British Marsh-Tit (*Parus palustris dresseri*) were clearly distinguishable—the rusty-black crown with no trace of gloss, the pinkish-buff sides of neck and flanks, and the pale buff patch on wing.

Curiously enough, while I watched them, these birds, engrossed with their feeding, made no sound.

W. WALMESLEY WHITE.

#### THREE LONG-TAILED TITS FEEDING ONE BROOD.

WHEN visiting the nest of a Long-tailed Tit (*Ægithalos caudatus roseus*) on May 18th, 1928, I noticed that there were three birds of that species near the nest. After a few minutes watching, each bird went down in turn to the nest and fed the young. I returned to count the young, thinking that possibly two females had laid the eggs and that both were assisting in the rearing of the young. They happened to be just leaving the nest, being fully-fledged, but not more than three had gone and there were eight left, so that the number was not particularly large. I remembered that on March 22nd, the day before I found the nest, I had seen three or four birds at the same spot. I thought they looked as if engaged in nesting, but as there were more than two I thought no more about it. The next day, when I found the nest, I only noticed two birds. The nest was then in the first stages of building. I was away at the time of laying and of incubation, so cannot say how many birds took part in these duties.

JOHN F. WYNNE.

[The presence of one or two birds in addition to the normal pair has been recorded not infrequently in the case of this

species. J. L. Bonhote (*B.B.*, I., p. 32) recorded four Long-tailed Tits at one nest; A. van P. Lechner (*t.c.*, p. 62) also recorded four birds feeding one brood of young. See also *op. cit.*, IV., p. 78 (S. Whiting) and *t.c.*, p. 209 (A. G. C. Tucker); *Field*, 20, IV., 1901 (L. Gray), etc.—F.C.R.J.]

#### GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN CORNWALL IN JUNE.

ON June 2nd, 1928, I, and three others with binoculars, watched a Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) for half an hour. It was in some wild common land near Mullion, being mobbed by Pipits and Swallows. PHILIP GOSSE.

#### WOODCHAT SHRIKE IN ANGLESEY.

WHEN near Porth Dafarch on the west coast of Anglesey on June 6th, 1928, my attention was drawn, by the anxious piping of two distracted Hedge-Sparrows on a whitethorn, to another bird which was perched on the top of the bush. At a distance of some fifteen yards I had splendid views through my glasses of the intruder and was pleased to find that the cause of the disturbance was a female Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius s. senator*). It had a buffish-chestnut crown, nape and hind neck, lighter on the forehead, a conspicuous white bar across each brown wing extending to the shoulders where the bar was broadest, mantle and tail brown, chin, throat and underparts white, and a brownish bill. The bird eventually flew on to some palings showing its white rump in flight. No black or brown feathers were visible on the fore-part of the crown or anywhere about the head.

So far as I am able to ascertain this is the first record of the occurrence of the species in Wales.

RICHARD W. JONES.

#### PIED FLYCATCHER IN SHROPSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE.

ON April 29th and 30th, 1928, a Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa h. hypoleuca*) was in continual song in my grounds along the Dowles Valley, alongside which the two counties adjoin. Although this neighbourhood appears to be an ideal haunt for this bird it was not afterwards observed. On May 27th I met with this species at Lydham in Salop, where a pair was evidently nesting within a few yards of the Montgomery border.

J. S. ELLIOTT.

#### EARLY NESTING OF BLACKCAP AND CHIFFCHAFF.

IN a Surrey wood on April 29th, 1928, I found a nest of a Blackcap (*Sylvia a. atricapilla*) containing four eggs. Two

subsequent visits were made on May 3rd and 6th, and on all three occasions the male bird was sitting. A fourth visit on May 12th found the eggs hatched and the young looked fully two days old.

On May 3rd, not a hundred yards away, there was a Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus c. collybita*) sitting on a clutch of six eggs which appeared to be three to four days incubated.

D. W. MUSSELWHITE.

[Nests of the Blackcap with four eggs have been recorded on April 24th, 1914, near Bristol (*B.B.*, VIII., p. 16), and on April 24th, 1920, in Berkshire (E. E. Pettett). For instances of early nesting of the Chiffchaff (first eggs laid April 23rd-27th) see *B.B.*, VIII., pp. 16, 48, and *Bull. B.O.C.*, XXVIII., p. 85; XXXII., p. 77.—F.C.R.J.]

#### MISTLE-THRUSH'S NEST ON BREAKWATER.

On May 4th, 1928, on the coast of Romney Marsh, Kent, I found a nest of a Mistle-Thrush (*Turdus v. viscivorus*). It was built on the top beam of a wooden breakwater about four feet above the sand and between two upright posts bolted together above the nest. At high tide the sea came about ten feet past the nest and the bird used to get drenched with spray from the breaking waves, though the actual water level was, of course, some way below the nest. I have never heard of a similar site.

DAVID L. LACK.

#### SHORT INTERVAL BETWEEN BROODS OF SONG-THRUSH.

In the nest of a Song-Thrush (*Turdus p. clarkeri*) in my garden in Suffolk, the three surviving chicks were fledged on April 28th. On May 6th the bird was sitting on four eggs in the same nest. At 9.30 a.m. on the 19th there was one newly-hatched chick and four eggs, so that only just three weeks elapsed between the fledging of the first brood and hatching of the second, whilst the first egg of the second clutch must have been laid not more than four days after the previous brood were fledged. Of this second clutch, two eggs were infertile, two chicks died on hatching, and only one is being reared.

CHARLES E. ALFORD.

#### PROBABLE ISABELLINE WHEATEAR IN CARNARVONSHIRE.

On May 13th, 1928, whilst examining the Wheatears (*Enanthe enanthe*) on the Great Ormes Head, Llandudno, I noticed one bird that was very much lighter in colour than the other

female Wheatears. When I put the glass on it I saw at once that it was a new species to me. I watched it feeding with the other Wheatears within a range of twenty yards. I also saw it resting on one of the numerous limestone boulders and had good breast, side and back views. It was quite as large as the Greenland Wheatears and was both larger in the body and higher on the legs than the Common Wheatears, both of which were present at the time.

Altogether, I had it under observation for over three hours, and when I left it was still there. On my return home, I looked up the plate of Wheatears in Thorburn's *British Birds*, and the one he figures as Isabelline Wheatear (*C. isabellina*) is a similar bird to the one I had under observation. The next day I went to the Manchester Museum and was shown the specimen of Isabelline Wheatear in the Dresser collection by Mr. T. A. Coward. It is in exactly the same plumage as the bird I had seen.

GEORGE F. GEE.

#### NIGHTINGALE IN SOUTH DEVON.

It was reported to us by Mr. J. L. Dobell of South Efford, Aveton Gifford, south Devon, that there were three Nightingales (*Luscinia m. megarhyncha*) singing in the Aune (Avon) valley between Aveton Gifford and the coast. On May 10th we went to investigate this, and are able to confirm his statement with regard to one bird only. This bird was in full song and we listened to it for more than an hour, between 9.45 and 11 p.m., so that there can be no doubt of its identity. Mr. Dobell himself, though not a naturalist, has long been familiar with the Nightingale's song in other counties.

The bird heard by us has been singing since April 20th in a blackthorn thicket overhanging the river near Aveton Gifford. A second bird has been heard by Mr. Dobell about a quarter of a mile below this, and a third in a wood about half a mile below the first. He has heard the first and third singing simultaneously. We were unable to hear either of the birds lower down the river, but we have no doubt that Mr. Dobell's statement is unexceptionable.

In "The Practical Handbook" (p. 470) no record is given of the Nightingale west of the Dart, and, although such records exist, they refer to casual birds. Mr. Dobell has heard the Nightingale near his house almost every spring for the last five-and-twenty years, but never before this year has it *stayed more than a few days*, generally only two or three. The bird heard by us has now been singing for three weeks and there is no doubt that it is resident there, either unmated

or breeding. There are other birds in the valley, so that the evidence is strongly in favour of the latter.

V. C. WYNNE-EDWARDS.

H. G. HURRELL.

L. MAJOR.

#### EARLY NESTING OF NIGHTINGALE IN DORSET.

ON May 6th, 1928, one of our boys at Sherborne School, Dorset, found the nest of a Nightingale (*Luscinia m. megarhyncha*) containing four eggs near Sherborne. This seems an early date in view of the cold spring. C. PALMER.

[Mr. A. Collett has recorded a nest with one egg on April 30th, 1893 (*B.B.*, Vol. VIII., p. 49), and Mr. O. V. Aplin one with four eggs on May 5th, 1893 (*Zool.* 1894, p. 97). It is noteworthy that both were found in the warm spring of 1893. On May 1st, 1902, I found a nest with four eggs at Fen Ditton, Cambs.—N.F.T.]

#### TAWNY OWL AND STARLING NESTING CLOSE TOGETHER.

A TAWNY Owl (*Strix aluco sylvatica*) has nested at Cheadle, Staffs, in a hole in a decayed stump of a tree and the three young ones can be seen in the nest by anyone passing it. A Starling (*Sturnus v. vulgaris*) is seen daily to alight within a few inches of the young Owls with food in its bill for her young, which are apparently in a deep hole in the same cavity in the tree stump as that occupied by the Owls.

One would have thought that the parent Owls would resent this intrusion of the Starlings into their sanctuary. One of the Owls did recently show resentment by striking a passerby a severe blow on the side of his head, which momentarily appeared to stun the bird, as it fell to the ground, but soon recovered and flew away.

JOHN R. B. MASEFIELD.

#### GARGANEY IN WARWICKSHIRE.

ON April 18th, 1928, I saw an adult male Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) with some Teal (*A. c. crecca*) in Sutton Park. This appears to be the first record of the species for the district and, I think, for Warwickshire. B. A. CARTER.

#### FULMAR PETREL BREEDING IN NORTHUMBERLAND.

ALTHOUGH the Fulmar Petrel (*Fulmaris g. glacialis*) has been reported as haunting various parts of the Northumberland coast during the early weeks of each breeding season since 1919, there has not, so far as I am aware, been any definite

record of its having attempted to breed. This year there is a very large increase in the number of birds and I have already seen eggs on sea cliffs in two different parts of the coast.

GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY.

#### STONE-CURLEW IN IRELAND.

ABOUT May 16th, 1928, a country boy from Kilkenny brought a Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus æ. cedicnemus*) to Messrs. M. Flanagan, poulterers, of Waterford. Fortunately, I saw it in time and got it. I cannot say exactly where or how the bird was killed, but Messrs. Williams & Son of Dublin confirm the identification and inform me that the last Irish record was in 1884.

A. DOUGLAS DENNY.

#### A TRANS-ATLANTIC PASSAGE OF LAPWINGS.

WITH reference to the article on this subject in the last number of BRITISH BIRDS and the rather indefinite records of the arrival of Lapwings in Newfoundland before December 20th, I have now received confirmatory evidence from Mr. Gower Rabbitts concerning one of these records mentioned on page 8. Mr. Rabbitts has heard from Mr. J. Morgan of Garnish, stating that the first Lapwing he saw at Garnish was on December 16th and 17th, which was in the week previous to that in which he first wrote. Although Mr. Morgan does not definitely say so this appears to have been a single bird. It is therefore evident that there was a flight of at least some birds independent of the main arrival on the 20th.

The Director of the Meteorological Office, Air Ministry, informs me that conditions of the 16th were not dissimilar to those on the 20th, there being an easterly wind of about 50 m.p.h. along most of the route. The 17th would have been less favourable as the birds would have been taken up too near Greenland.

An indication that there was a general movement of Lapwings about the date of the trans-atlantic passage is afforded by Mr. C. S. Bayne, who informs me that on December 18th he and other members of the London Natural History Society saw a large migration of Lapwings in progress in the neighbourhood of Broxbourne, Herts. The birds were passing over in a westerly direction all day. They were in parties varying from five to about a hundred.

It may be mentioned here that Mr. P. A. Taverner informs me that he has had fragments of a European Coot sent to him from Newfoundland, where the bird was taken shortly before March 21st, 1928. This seems to be the first record of the bird's occurrence in North America. H. F. WITHERBY.

## LAPWING IN CANADA.

BY permission of one of my correspondents, Mr. William Banks of Ottawa, Ontario, I am able to add a record of a Lapwing in Canada to those listed by Mr. Witherby (*antea*, p. 13). In October, 1911, Mr. Banks was in the market in Ottawa, and his attention was called by a French-Canadian to a freshly-killed Lapwing which was hanging up for sale; the man had never before seen a bird like it and asked what it was. Mr. Banks told him, adding that its French name was "dix-huit." Mr. Banks formerly resided near Manchester, and had shot many Lapwings in England and Wales, and in winter in Anglesey had noticed the westward flight towards Ireland during hard weather. He has never seen any other Lapwing in Canada except the specimen in the museum at St. John's, Newfoundland, which is probably the 1905 bird recorded in the *Auk*.

T. A. COWARD.

## LITTLE STINTS IN CO. DUBLIN IN SPRING.

ON May 26th, 1928, on the Strand at Malahide, co. Dublin, Mr. P. E. Dunn and I saw and identified a pair of Little Stints (*Calidris minuta*). In *A Practical Handbook of British Birds* it is stated that there has been only one doubtful spring record of this species in Ireland. We have no doubt about our identification. We had good glasses and we got up quite close. Soon afterwards we came across a flock of about a dozen Dunlins in summer plumage and were able to notice the various points of difference between the two species.

P. G. KENNEDY.

## RED-NECKED PHALAROPE IN STAFFORDSHIRE.

I HAVE just had reported to me by Mrs. Sneyd of "Woodlands," Cheddleton, near Leek, the occurrence there of a Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) in May, 1926. She identified it at once and accurately described it to me. The bird was caught alive in a greenhouse by her gardener. When released the bird instantly dived into a water-butt, and on coming to the surface again it flew away. Though a somewhat belated record I am anxious to include the bird in our North Staffordshire list. A bird of this species was reported from Handsworth in South Staffordshire in 1874.

JOHN R. B. MASEFIELD.

## BLACK-TAILED GODWIT IN LANCASHIRE.

THE note by Mr. A. W. Boyd (*antea*, p. 23) interested me, for April is the only month in which I have failed to observe

the Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa l. limosa*) in Lancashire. The bird is certainly casual, if not rare, in spring, and my records are few. In addition to the note (Vol. XIV., p. 64) I have the following date for a solitary bird at Ainsdale: May 6th, 1917.

This Godwit has not wintered freely since 1917, and in that severe winter birds were frequently observed up to March 20th. In a few of the ensuing years individuals remained through the winter, but disappeared in the latter half of February. Mid-July to September is apparently the chief passage period, and I believe that the Black-tailed Godwit is a consistent arrival on the west coast in July.

F. W. HOLDER.

#### ICELAND GULL IN KENT.

ROUGH weather on the south coast always brings Herring and Black-backed Gulls into Romney Marsh at high tide. With them, on April 30th, 1928, the second day of a cold and showery north wind, I saw an Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*).

A Gull, dead white all over, could only have been one of three species and its size, slightly smaller than the Herring Gulls with which it was standing, its comparatively long slender wings and pale yellowish legs, excludes the Glaucous or Ivory Gulls.

I watched it for about half an hour, concealed behind a bank overlooking the marsh, while it preened itself on a mud bank. It later flew up, when the long wings were noticeable, and settled in a patch of grass. Good opportunities of comparison with the Herring Gulls, its neighbours, were given.

April 30th seems a very late date for this bird to be on the south coast of England.

DAVID L. LACK.

[For previous records see Vols. VIII., p. 53; IX., p. 272, and X., p. 263. April 19th seems to be the latest recorded date in spring.—N.F.T.]

#### ARCTIC SKUA OFF GALWAY IN JUNE.

IN view of the scarcity of occurrences of the Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) in May and June off the Irish coast, it may be worth recording that, on June 1st when in the vicinity of Inisheer, the southern of the Aran Islands, I observed one.

The day was fine with a fresh east wind and consequent dull haze and the bird passed quite close to the boat I was in, flying leisurely north-eastwards.

ROBERT F. RUTLEDGE.