

NOTES

“ BRITISH BIRDS ” MARKING SCHEME.

“ RINGERS ” are requested to send in to the Editor, not later than October 1st, their schedules, together with a list showing the number of each species ringed.

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL BREEDING IN NORTH ENGLAND.

IT was so long ago as 1869-70 that *Motacilla flava flava* was recorded as breeding at Dunston, near Newcastle ; but since about that period there has been no authentic instance of its having nested in the northern counties of England. It may therefore be of interest to put upon record the fact that it is this season (1928) again nesting on Tyneside.

As the locality has been much raided by egg-collectors of recent years, it seems undesirable to publish further details, but I have seen at least two nesting pairs, one of which was feeding well-grown young in the nest on July 23rd.

GEORGE BOLAM.

MULTIPLE NEST-BUILDING BY PIED-WAGTAIL.

A PIED WAGTAIL (*Motacilla a. yarrellii*) built six nests this



spring in a group of nine ventilation-holes in the side of a farm-building at Sandiway Farm, near Great Budworth, Cheshire. One of the holes was occupied by a piece of iron and two were

left empty ; each of the others contained a complete and lined nest ; the Wagtail laid in one nest which held two youngsters on May 25th, 1928.

In *British Birds*, Vol. XIX., p. 97, Mr. Jourdain, in a footnote to another record of multiple nest-building, pointed out that in each recorded case these nests had been built in some artificial objects (such as a pile of pipes, a series of rafters, or the rungs of a ladder) and never under purely natural conditions, and this rule certainly holds good in the present case. There were at that time records of multiple nest-building by Blackbird, Song-Thrush, Robin, Redstart and Chaffinch.

The accompanying photograph gives some idea of the nests. A. W. BOYD.

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER SEEN IN NORFOLK.

ON the evening of May 4th, 1928, as I was leaving Hickling Broad, I saw a small Warbler in the fence by the roadside. It was very tired and tame and allowed me to watch it within a few feet, when it would fly a short distance and settle again, until it disappeared into a thick clipped fence. Both when the bird was sitting and flying the wing-bars were very conspicuous, as was the eyestripe when it was resting. The wing-bars and the small size of the bird first drew my attention as I was cycling past. The short tail and size cause it to resemble a Goldcrest in flight more than a Warbler ; or a small Willow-Wren with a short tail, if I had to draw comparison with the Warblers. The wind was easterly at the time.

In 1906 I obtained a Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus h. præmium*) at Cley, and have no doubt that the bird described above was of the same species. J. VINCENT.

THREE SUCCESSIVE BROODS OF SONG-THRUSH IN SAME NEST.

WITH reference to my previous note (*antea*, p. 40) on the short interval between the broods of a Song-Thrush (*Turdus ph. clarkei*), this same bird (presumably) has now reared yet another brood, making three successive broods in the same nest in a single season. The one remaining chick of the second brood was fledged on June 1st, two infertile eggs remaining in the nest. On June 9th she was repairing the nest ; on the 10th one of the infertile eggs had been removed ; on the 14th there was one fresh egg, the one remaining in fertile egg being still in the nest ; on the 15th there was

another egg. By the 18th the other infertile egg had been removed and there were now three fresh eggs. On July 1st there were two chicks (one of these fell from the nest later and was killed), the survivor being fledged on July 12th. The other egg, although containing a nearly-formed chick, failed to hatch. A summary of the broods is as follows:—

1st brood, 4 eggs, 3 chicks, fledged April 28th.

2nd brood, 5 eggs, 3 chicks (only one survived), fledged June 1st.

3rd brood, 3 eggs, 2 chicks (only one survived), fledged July 12th.

Total reared—five chicks from twelve eggs.

The bird was a remarkably close sitter.

CHARLES E. ALFORD.

[It is apparently less common to find the Song-Thrush using the same nest twice in the season than the Blackbird, though there are a fair number of cases on record of this occurrence. (See *Report Caradoc and Severn Valley F.C.*, 1905, p. 24, and 1920, p. 16; *Zool*, 1906, p. 312; 1913, p. 467, etc.). The only other case of the British Song-Thrush adopting this somewhat perfunctory method three times in one season with which I am acquainted is contained in a note in the *Field* for July 31st, 1875.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

BLACKBIRDS' ATTACHMENT TO TERRITORY.

ALTHOUGH not unusual for the Blackbird (*Turdus m. merula*) to use the same nest for a second or third brood, the following observations (made in my garden in Mawgan-in-Pydar, on the north coast of Cornwall) must be of some interest, because they prove how attached this bird can become to a certain territory and the same nest.

In 1925 a pair nested successfully in a tall escalonia hedge close to the house. The fence was so "woody" and ragged that the only hope of re-establishing it was to cut it back hard to within two feet of the ground and this I had done during the winter. The birds were very tame and fed, almost daily, on the terrace all the winter.

In March, 1926, the hen built her nest in the branch of a large stone pine twenty feet above the ground level; it stood only a few paces distant from the cut fence. In this nest three strong broods were reared. Although the nest was severely battered in the winter by fierce Atlantic gales, it stood firm.

In March, 1927, the same nest was relined and again three broods safely reared in it. The gales of the succeeding

winter were too much for the now rotted materials and it was blown away. The same birds, as previously, remained constantly near the house.

In March, 1928, the hen built in the same tree, but in a stouter branch fully fifty feet above the ground. Two broods were safely reared in this nest and a third clutch of eggs hatched in it. But, to my intense regret, when the nestlings were a week old, the cock was killed and I was unable to discover the cause. The hen, single handed, continued both to brood and feed the nestlings. But, after three days, a cold and drizzly spell intervened and, the task being beyond her compass, the young died of unavoidable exposure.

The hen, though now unmated, is still faithful to her long possessed territory. It will be a matter of interest, next spring, to see whether she will remate and nest again in her favourite pine.

The rearing of nine broods in only two nests is an unique experience to me, as also is the construction of a nest at so great a height from the ground as fifty feet.

I append the dates of incubation and fledging of the various broods during the three years the birds were kept under close and constant observation.

Year	1ST BROOD		2ND BROOD		3RD BROOD		
	Incubation begun	Young left Nest	Incubation begun	Young left Nest	Incubation begun	Young left Nest	
1926	22/3	19/4	1/5	30/5	23/6	21/7	All six broods in the same nest.
1927	2/4	1/5	8/5	6/6	26/6	25/7	
1928	21/3	20/4	30/4	30/5	16/6	see note	

NOTE.—Eggs hatched June 30th, cock killed July 6th, young died in nest July 9th. The weather between March 22nd and 27th, 1927, was cold, wet and stormy.

B. H. RYVES.

BLACKBIRD TAKING A FROG.

WHEN motoring through a country lane near Battle, Sussex, a few days ago, two Blackbirds (*Turdus m. merula*) suddenly started to fly across the road, one apparently chasing the other. On either side of the lane was a steep bank which prevented the birds from seeing the car until they were upon it. The birds were very scared, and, in turning to re-enter the wood from which they had just come, the leading bird dropped a frog which I should say was more than half grown.

I have never heard of Blackbirds eating frogs, and, if they

do, one would suppose they only attacked very little frogs, but I distinctly saw the frog, which dropped almost on to the car, so I have no doubt as to its size. STEPHEN J. WHITE.

INCREASE OF NIGHTINGALES IN DEVON.

PERHAPS I may briefly add my own experience of Nightingales in Devon to the interesting note recently given (*antea*, p. 41). On May 1st, 1924, I heard two Nightingales (*Luscinia m. megarhyncha*), at least two miles apart, near the village of Sticklepath on the northern slope of Dartmoor, and twelve miles west of the limit usually reached by this species as defined in *British Birds*, Vol. V., p. 6. Both these birds too were singing at about 700 ft. above sea-level—an exceptional altitude. I am quite convinced that the Nightingale is much more frequent in S.E. Devon now than it was even ten years ago, and that it is slowly but steadily increasing its range westwards. This is probably the case in many districts, but I have noticed it particularly in the Budleigh-Salterton area. Last year, 1927, two Nightingales sang for several weeks in this neighbourhood, and this year three have been heard within a radius of two miles.

I found one established with its mate among bushes on a landslide below a high cliff, and not 100 yards from the seashore. This seems a curious and unusual habitat.

Some supposed Nightingales on investigation have turned out to be night-singing Woodlarks (*Lullula a. arborea*); but if only this large county had a sufficiency of competent observers many more Nightingales would, I am sure, be found in hitherto unsuspected places. W. WALMESLEY WHITE.

SWIFT TAKING FOOD FROM UNDER EAVES.

ON July 12th, 1928, whilst waiting in the shade of a house at Batford, near Harpenden, I was very much interested in the movements of a Swift (*Apus a. apus*). It kept flying under the eaves at various points and started picking insects (or spiders) from the wood-work and the bricks. I watched it for quite ten minutes, and there was no doubt that food, not grit, was its object. The bird was no more than 20 feet above my head, so that I could see it, and even some of its victims, distinctly. It is new to me that Swifts obtain their food otherwise than in the air, though I have seen Swallows alight on a lawn and feed, apparently, on some insect within reach.

A. H. MEIKLEJOHN.

NIGHTJAR NESTING ON SHINGLE.

ON July 15th, 1928, I flushed a Nightjar (*Caprimulgus e. europæus*) off eggs in what I should think is an unusual site, viz., on the wide landward slope of the shingle bank about 200 yards south of Haven House between Aldeburgh and Thorpeness, Suffolk. The spot was a typical one for the Ringed Plover, consisting of shingle with sparse growths



of coarse grass, horned poppy, a few docks, etc. No trees, gorse bushes, bracken or other features of the usual Nightjar haunt were in sight, or at least anywhere near. T. G. POWELL.

[The Nightjar has nested in similar situations on Dungeness, Kent, for several years past.—N.F.T.]

COMMON BUZZARD IN HERTFORDSHIRE AND BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

ON May 30th, 1928, I saw a pair of Common Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) flying over Ringshall Common, part of the National Trust Ashridge Estate, on the borders of Herts and Bucks.

On June 23rd a pair were flying on the same line over Duncombe's Terrace Woods. On July 4th I saw one near Duncombe's Terrace Woods. It was flying low, I think it

had risen from a tree, and then rose in spirals until I lost sight of it. I had previously, on May 7th, had a distant glimpse of a Buzzard near the same place, too doubtful to record, but now it seems likely to have been one.

RUTH BLEZARD.

BITTERN IN BEDFORDSHIRE.

DURING the severe spell of weather in December, 1927, two Bitterns (*Botaurus stellaris*) were killed in this county, one by a dog (so possibly maimed previously) at Barton-in-the-Clay about the 15th, and another, unfortunately shot, from the brook running alongside the highway at Elstow on the 28th.

Since the winter of 1899-1900, which was a Bittern year generally and when no less than five were killed locally and two others seen, the more recent unrecorded occurrences in this county are: one flushed from the Ouse at Biddenham in January, 1903; two shot from the same waterway at Kempston and Goldington in January, 1907; another killed about January 25th, 1909, and one seen at the end of November following, both in the latter locality. In 1918 two were shot from the Goldington stretch of the river, again at the latter end of January.

J. S. ELLIOTT.

BRENT GOOSE IN CO. ANTRIM IN JULY.

WHILE visiting Muck Island, off Islandmagee, co. Antrim, on the evening of July 2nd, 1928, I observed a pair of Brent Geese (*Branta bernicla*) swimming in leisurely fashion in the vicinity of a boulder-strewn gravel bar. The birds subsequently landed on the bar with the obvious intention of spending the night there. I had the unusual good fortune of approaching within ten yards of the pair before they swam off with surprising unconcern. C. BLAKE WHELAN.

[An occurrence in June in co. Antrim is recorded in *Br. B.*, Vol. XXI., p. 65.—EDS.]

THE BLACK BRENT GEESE RECORDED BY THE LATE F. COBURN.

IN *A Practical Handbook of British Birds*, Vol. II., p. 258, there is a note about a number of specimens of *Branta b. nigricans* recorded from Staffordshire (November, 1895), Warwickshire (November, 1897) and Norfolk (February, 1902, January, 1907, and January, 1909) by the late F. Coburn. While we never accepted these as authentic, they were so accepted by the late J. H. Gurney (*Zool.* 1908, pp. 121-123 and 1910, p. 123). Dr.

B. B. Riviere, who has for some years been working systematically to bring the *Birds of Norfolk* up to date, was anxious to have critically examined the three supposed specimens of this goose taken in the Wash, Norfolk, which were formerly in the collection of the late J. H. Gurney (who received them from Coburn) and are now in the Norwich Castle Museum. I am much indebted to Dr. Riviere and the authorities of the Museum for having given me the opportunity of examining these birds. They are labelled Kings Lynn, January 26th, 1909, on which date Mr. Gurney states (*Zoologist* 1910, p. 123) seven of this form were killed in the Wash, while altogether fourteen were obtained from gunners by Mr. Coburn during this month and December, 1908.

I have compared them carefully with the very good series of twenty skins of *B. b. nigricans* in the British Museum, and with the larger series of *B. b. bernicla* in the same and in my own collection, and find them to be undoubtedly *B. b. bernicla* and not *nigricans* at all. *B. b. nigricans* is uniformly and constantly darker on the upper-parts than any of these three birds and than any British-taken Brents I have seen, also the under-parts of *nigricans* are darker, and sometimes much darker. With regard to the white neck-patches the majority of *nigricans* have the white joined in the front of the neck, and none of these has. In one (a male) the neck-patches are as large as in some *nigricans*, but the upper- and under-parts of this bird are markedly paler than any *B. b. nigricans*. In another (a female) the neck-patches are also large, though no larger than in some other *B. b. bernicla*, and the upper-parts are distinctly paler than in *B. b. nigricans*. The third bird (a male) is one of the darkest Common Brents I have seen but its neck-patches are quite normal.

Coburn appears to have been misled by the character of the size of the white neck-patches. This varies in both forms, though in many *B. b. nigricans* the white meets in the front of the neck, which it never definitely does in *B. b. bernicla*. Another distinguishing character for *B. b. nigricans* mentioned by Coburn is that the under tail-coverts project beyond the tail-feathers, but I find this variable in both forms. A very few *B. b. bernicla* also approach very nearly some *B. b. nigricans* in the colour of the under-parts, and the colour of the *upper-parts* (not mentioned by Coburn) is no doubt the most constant character.

Had the specimens recorded by Coburn as having occurred in different parts of the country in different years really been of this form one would have had to conclude that the bird

was a fairly regular migrant to this country, which is scarcely credible since it inhabits the Pacific side of America and eastern Asia as far west as the Lena.

H. F. WITHERBY.

WOOD-PIGEONS AND CHERRIES.

RECENTLY, Mr. H. H. Foster, Court Lodge Farm, Boxley, Kent, shot a Wood-Pigeon (*Columba p. palumbus*) in his cherry orchards at 5.30 a.m. On opening the bird's crop he found in it 82 "Napoleon" cherries. These cherries were in the soft state before the stone was hard. The Pigeon had started on the "Early Rivers" cherry and when the stone became hard had moved to a later sort, finishing with the "Napoleons," the latest variety in these orchards. On July 14th, Mr. Foster gathered off the tree 82 cherries (not selected) and these weighed 1 lb. 2 oz. Cherries are selling retail at 1s. per lb. The Pigeons were coming into the orchards in flocks of ten and upwards. The bird shot had not finished feeding, so that 82 cherries is a very low estimate of the number it would consume in one meal. Unless frightened away these Pigeons would have fed in the orchards as long as the cherries had not "stoned," and as they are planted for a sequence the damage that could be done by even ten Pigeons during the season is almost sufficient to ruin the crop.

JAMES R. HALE.

EARLY NESTING OF TURTLE-DOVE IN CHESHIRE.

ON May 16th, 1928, at Frandley, near Great Budworth, Cheshire, I put a Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia t. turtur*) off a nest with two eggs in a sallow bush; I learnt later from a labourer that the first egg was laid on May 12th. The first Turtle-Dove of the season was seen a few yards from this spot on April 28th.

From a note in *British Birds*, Vol. VIII., p. 77, it appears that there is only one record of an egg earlier than May 12th; but that was considerably earlier—May 1st in Essex.

A. W. BOYD.

[On May 22nd, 1893, I found two young Turtle-Doves about four days old in a nest on the Gog-Magog hills near Cambridge. In this case the first egg must have been laid about May 2nd or 3rd.—N.F.T.]

RINGED PLOVERS' DEFENCE OF TERRITORY.

AT the mouth of the River Cuckmere the shingle is piled up into banks. On a visit there with some boys on June 17th,

1928, I found a pair of Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) occupying each of these banks. As we approached one bank a pair of birds would fly off to the next bank, and the occupying pair, or at any rate one of them, would attack the intruders. No actual fighting took place because the trespassers, after running a short distance, would fly on. A belated Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), however, settled in one of the Ringed Plovers' territories, and, being apparently ignorant of the conditions, was knocked right over, and appeared to remain stunned for a time.

NORMAN H. JOY.

THE BREEDING OF THE SPOTTED CRAKE IN SOUTH WALES.

THE breeding of the Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) in our Islands has been recorded on but few occasions, and for a good many years not at all. The following notes, therefore, may be acceptable.

Acting on information received from some Snipe shooters in the previous August, which suggested the presence of Spotted Crakes in a certain marsh in South Wales, I visited the place on May 20th, 1927, accompanied by a young friend. No Spotted Crake was seen, though a low grunting sound -- heard by my companion -- may have emanated from one of these birds. I did, however, discover an obvious small Crake's nest, apparently just completed, in a clump of rushes. This find was re-examined a week later, but still there were no eggs in it ; and a further search proved fruitless.

On May 17th, 1928, with Walpole-Bond, I visited the same locality. During our search of the marsh at least two veritable Spotted Crakes on wing, disjointed limp-looking birds with dangling legs -- were flushed at close quarters, when their pale-spotted brown plumage and the red at the base of their bills were plainly visible ; and again, in much the same spot as last year, I found an obvious Crake's nest. This time, though, it was in a tussock of soft grass and was not in an advanced condition. Nevertheless, I was pleased with the day's doings, since I felt that in all probability the actual breeding-site had now been fined down to an oblong of ground, roughly 100 yards in length by 50 yards in width.

Thereafter, on May 21st, this time with another assistant besides Walpole-Bond, the hunt was renewed, systematic searching in line very close together being the order of the day. At the very commencement of the third turn I parted the top of a grass-tussock, and exposed to view a Spotted

Crake's nest with nine eggs. They were fresh and stone cold, and reminded me of diminutive Moorhens' eggs.

The nest, a compact, neatly-built structure, about 5 inches across by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth externally, with an egg-cup 4 inches across by 3 inches deep, was sunk into the bottom of a tussock of soft grass (about 1 ft. 6 inches in height), one of thousands of such tufts growing on wet (there were but 3 inches of water) but firm ground. It was a simple affair, albeit carefully constructed of fine, soft, dead grasses, and one or two dead leaves of the common willow. Owing to the blades of the tussock arching inwards, not a vestige of the nest or its contents was visible till the herbage had been disarranged. The bird, as was evident, approached its home by means of a small tunnel leading up from the water level.

H. A. GILBERT.