

NOTES

GOLDFINCH DECORATING NEST.

ON May 4th, 1928, I watched a Goldfinch (*Carduelis c. britannica*) snapping off the stalks, about two inches from the head, of some "Forget-me-nots" (*Myosotis*) in our garden in west Sussex. The bird, which was accompanied by a second bird, soon flew off with three or four flowers in its bill, presumably to be added to its nest.

W. D. SHAW.

ON May 5th, 1928, I found a nest of Goldfinch in my garden at Sidlesham, west Sussex, completely lined with the flowering heads of "Forget-me-not," the outside being composed of silver lichens—a beautiful work of art. A few days later the normal white wool lining had been added and the eggs were then laid.

H. T. GOSNELL.

COMMON CROSSBILLS BREEDING IN DEVON.

SOME years ago a friend of mine, Mr. A. B. Gay, told me that a pair of Crossbills (*Loxia c. curvirostra*) had been breeding in his garden in Lapford parish in north Devon, and as D'Urban and Mathew give but one instance of this bird nesting in their *Birds of Devon*, the record of this fresh nest might be interesting.

Mr. Gay writes as follows: "I saw the birds first about April 10th (1923) and found the nest on April 25th. It was then practically finished and was built on top of a horizontal branch of a big fir in my boundary fence. It was about 18 feet from the ground and 8 or 10 feet from the main trunk; very like a Greenfinch's nest, but seemed to me more loosely built. It was well hidden from below by other branches. The first egg was laid on May 1st and on May 6th the hen was sitting on four eggs. The young birds left the nest on June 8th and went away within a few days. The old birds appeared to be much greyer in colour than most of those I have seen—the hen especially so."

OWEN WYNNE.

SOME BREEDING-HABITS OF THE PIED FLYCATCHER.

THE behaviour of the male Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa h. hypoleuca*) on its first arrival is remarkable. Though gentle and weak in appearance it is one of the most pugnacious birds. Mr. O. R. Owen (*in litt.*) has told me how he has known Great Tits and Nuthatches robbed of their nesting sites by this apparently weak little bird.

The male Pied Flycatcher, within a very few hours of its first arrival, finds or usurps a suitable nesting site, and is extremely jealous of any near approach to its chosen place by its own species or by any other birds which nest in holes. In 1927 a male arrived in my garden, which is outside the regular breeding haunt of the species, and took possession of a nesting box. This bird sang continuously for most of the day, scuffled with Tits and other likely rivals for its home, and locked into the box or perched on it at frequent intervals. It found no mate, however, and after waiting three weeks, until well on into June, it disappeared (exactly as the male Nightingale does in the same district and for the same reason).

On May 15th, 1927, I and two other observers tried to find a Pied Flycatcher's nest on the banks of the Wye below Bulth. In the course of four hours continuous observation the female was never seen and the male showed interest in one hole only. That hole contained no sign of a nest, and we were puzzled.

However, I returned on May 21st with my wife; when we had been watching for over an hour a hen Pied Flycatcher arrived on the scene. The cock instantly became excited, and after shaking his wings, and emitting very shrill mouse-like squeaks, flew to his chosen nest-hole. The hen took no notice of this invitation at first and indeed, when the cock flew towards her, she attacked him violently and viciously. However, she was ultimately pacified, and after many more flutterings and squeakings by the male, was persuaded to visit the nesting-hole. She first dived into the hole and out again, and then, standing statuesque and upright for a long time at the mouth of the hole, inspected the site from outside. Evidently satisfied at last she dived into the hole and crept out again at frequent intervals for a long time—in fact, until we departed. During this time the cock began to sing, but readily relapsed into his former shrill note whenever he came near the hen.

A month later this hole contained a young brood—and presumably we had seen the first arrival of the hen bird.

The descriptions of the arrival of various female Warblers by Mr. Elliot Howard became of greater interest to us even than before after having viewed this little scene.

H. A. GILBERT.

RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER IN NORTHUMBERLAND.

WHEN I was walking with my gun along the shore near Boulmer, Northumberland, on October 1st, 1928, my attention

was attracted by a small bird, which was unknown to me, in company with two Rock-Pipits (*Anthus s. petrosus*). It was very restless and kept continually jerking its tail up and down after the manner of a Stonechat. As I could by no means determine what it was I shot it. When I got home I looked it up in Coward's *The Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*, and eventually came to the conclusion that it was a Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa p. parva*) in immature plumage. To make certain, however, I sent it to the Curator of the Hancock Museum, Newcastle-on-Tyne, who kindly identified it for me.

W. S. CRASTER.

PEREGRINE FALCON NESTING ON THE GROUND IN HAMPSHIRE.

WITH the exception of the statement in *The British Bird Book* (Kirkman), repeated in the *Practical Handbook of Birds* (Witherby), that "The species has been found nesting among heather on a low-lying islet" there appears to be nothing recorded of the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco p. peregrinus*) nesting on the ground in this country.

In early May of this year (1928) I investigated a case of this kind and obtained clear and convincing proof of the genuineness of the case, and have no hesitancy in putting it on record.

The lad who found the nest showed me the eggs unblown—undoubtedly Peregrine's—and conducted me to the nest, a shallow depression in the short scrubby heather at the base of a stump of a small Scots pine, standing on a dry part of a flat, boggy and unfrequented heath common in west Hampshire. This common, and similar open wastes in Dorset, are favourite hunting grounds of the Peregrine.

W. J. ASHFORD.

FROM two independent sources I have received confirmatory evidence of the breeding of the Peregrine Falcon on the ground in west Hampshire, recorded by Mr. Ashford above.

In the case referred to by me in *The British Bird Book* and the *Practical Handbook*, a Peregrine was flushed from eggs among deep heather on an islet off the Welsh coast, where there were no cliffs and the eyrie was only about 50 ft. above sea-level. This is scarcely a parallel case, however, as the isolation of the site provided some protection.

Newton, in the *Ootheca Wolleyana*, records some half dozen sets taken from hillocks in marshes in Enontekis Lappmark and East Bothnia, and more recently other cases of breeding on

the ground have been recorded from Finland in the pages of *Ornis Fennica*, IV. (1927), p. 120.

It is remarkable that though the Peregrine frequently breeds in open nests in trees on the Continent, there is, as yet, no positive record of this habit from the British Isles, and with the exception of the Welsh record mentioned above, this is the first case of breeding on the ground within our limits. If any proof were needed that the keeper's gun is the determining factor in the status of this species, and not the collector, it may be found in the adoption of every available site in districts where there is little game preservation and persistent, but unavailing, efforts to establish itself on the grouse moors, even in counties in the middle of England where for centuries it has been unknown as a breeding species.

F. C. R. JOURDAIN.

SHELD-DUCK BREEDING IN TREE IN SUFFOLK.

ON May 24th, 1926, I noticed a hole in an oak tree on the banks of the Orwell in Woolverstone Park, at about 30 feet from the ground, which had been formed where a branch had been broken off. The hole was about three feet in depth and in this cavity was a nest of a Sheld-duck (*Tadorna tadorna*) with four eggs. The country round is full of rabbit holes, and it is evident that many of them are occupied by the Sheld-ducks, since I have seen as many as 40 birds within about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles in this district.

On April 13th, 1927, in the same clump of trees, I noticed a Sheld-duck fly up to a hole in an oak, but on approaching I found that the bird was unable to extricate itself, and with some difficulty I managed to free it. When released, it flew down the river where it was joined by another bird.

J. UTEN TODD.

LONG-TAILED DUCK IN THE ISLE OF MAN.

FROM November 1st to 11th, 1928, a Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), a female or immature bird, was seen in Derby Haven, Isle of Man, by Col. H. W. Madoc and myself. It usually fed in very shallow water, diving frequently within a foot or two of the beach, and on one occasion climbed out on to some weed-covered rocks, where it rested.

The Long-tailed Duck has not, I understand, been noted previously in the Isle of Man.

A. W. BOYD.

LONG-TAILED DUCK IN SURREY.

ON November 13th, 1928, while passing one of the reservoirs that are strung out along the Surrey bank of the Thames near

Hammersmith bridge, I stopped to watch a party of Tufted Duck diving for mussels. Among them I noticed a lighter-coloured bird of about the same size, also diving persistently, with very short pauses at the surface. On looking through my glass I found that it was a Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) without any long tail-feathers; more than that I cannot say. We are told that most specimens of this Duck obtained inland have proved to be immature males; this one may have been no exception to the rule, though I should have been quite ready to accept it as a female.

I have watched other Long-tailed Ducks while they were diving, but had not previously noticed, as with this individual, the extreme shortness of the intervals between the dives. It was not submerged for very long, not longer probably than the Tufted Ducks in company with it, but the pauses on the surface were so short that often there was not time to get the bird into the field of one's glass before it disappeared again. Four seconds, three seconds, sometimes even less than that, seemed long enough for it to "get its breath." On December 7th it was still there.

I am told that this duck has never been recorded as occurring in the county of Surrey. DONALD GUNN.

EARLY RUFFS AT OXFORD.

THREE Ruffs (*Philomachus pugnax*) were present on Port Meadow at Oxford from March 8th to 14th, 1928. They were seen repeatedly between these dates, generally associating with Lapwing, by D.M.C. and P.J.C., and on the 10th also by B.W.T. All three were yellow-legged birds, probably two Ruffs and a Reeve, judging from the sizes. The former, when viewed with a telescope, showed indications of darker feathers in the region of the upper-breast, which were probably the beginnings of the ruff. It is difficult to say whether these were passage migrants in the sense in which the term is commonly used—*i.e.*, migrating birds coming from abroad—or whether they were individuals which had wintered near at hand. Certainly they had not previously been on Port Meadow, and as it is not usual to find more than an occasional odd bird wintering in this country, it seems probable that they were early arrivals from the south. The occurrence is of interest, as the date is a month earlier than the normal beginning of the spring passage, which the *Practical Handbook* gives as mid-April.

P. J. CAMPBELL.

D. M. CAMPBELL.

B. W. TUCKER.

PROBABLE POMATORHINE SKUA IN
HERTFORDSHIRE.

IN the forenoon of November 22nd, 1928, when I was walking with Mr. T. A. Coward on the road near Little Tring, a Skua passed over the reservoirs at a considerable height, bearing steadily south-west on a line parallel with the Chiltern escarpment, a course one so often sees taken by migrating Gulls and Terns in autumn. The bird, an adult with white under-parts, looked more bulky than an Arctic Skua, and when it passed some Rooks we had a standard of comparison that showed it to be distinctly larger. A difference in the shape of its tail was apparent too, but this difference is not easy to describe. The date and the appearance of the bird left no reasonable room for doubt that it was a Pomatorhine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*).

CHAS. OLDHAM.

LITTLE AUK IN MIDDLESEX.

ON November 28th, 1928, when at the reservoir near Staines, I saw a Little Auk (*Alle alle*) which was so complaisant as to allow me to watch it for an hour at ever decreasing range till I was within a dozen yards of it. Except for the abnormal tameness, the bird showed no evidence of being ill. It preened and flapped its wings at times and had one short spell of fishing which ended with the capture of a small fish, brought to the surface to be swallowed. Its main concern appeared to be to keep head to wind in a sheltered corner; in me it showed no interest whatever. During the following week I saw it several times and could detect no difference in its behaviour, but on the night of December 6th it died, out of the water.

Little Auks have often been seen in Middlesex (though not mentioned in Harting's *Birds of Middlesex*), but I suppose most of them have been obviously starving birds driven inland by a gale. At any rate, it must be an unusual experience within the county to see one swimming quietly in fresh water for a whole week.

DONALD GUNN.

LITTLE AUKS ON NORFOLK COAST.

ON November 26th, 1928. I saw several small flocks of Little Auks (*Alle alle*) flying close in-shore at Hemsby, Norfolk. In all I counted fifty-two birds, all of which were flying from south to north.

J. M. FERRIER.

RED-BACKED SHRIKE IN CARNARVONSHIRE.—Mr. Richard Jones informs us that he saw a Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius*

collurio) on June 17th, 1928, in his garden at Gannock Park, Deganwy. The bird, however, stayed only a very short time and left in a southerly direction.

MISTLE-THRUSH LAYING TWICE IN SAME NEST.—With reference to the note on this subject (*antea*, p. 161), Mr. A. W. Boyd informs us that a Mistle-Thrush (*Turdus v. viscivorus*) built a nest in his orchard in Cheshire on March 26th, 1928, but its eggs were destroyed by a Magpie. The bird built again in another pear tree and in this nest had two broods of two and three young, which Mr. Boyd ringed on June 6th and July 19th respectively.

Mr. D. L. Lack also informs us that he found a Mistle-Thrush's nest in a small thorn bush near Littlestone, Kent, on April 15th, when it contained young birds, which left the nest on April 19th. On visiting the spot towards the end of the month Mr. Lack found a Mistle-Thrush incubating another clutch of eggs in the same nest.

Mr. W. D. Shaw states that on April 30th, 1927, he found a Mistle-Thrush's nest near Marlborough with four nestlings, which vacated the nest on his approach. On May 27th he was surprised to find four eggs in this nest and on June 7th it contained three well-grown nestlings. The nest at this date was in a very insecure condition, and would probably have fallen down had not Mr. Shaw tied it up with string and fastened it to the tree.

LATE MARTINS IN HAMPSHIRE.—Lord Montagu informs us that he saw four Martins (*Delichon urbica*) at Beaulieu on November 27th, and one on December 7th, 1928. Stragglers are frequent up to the middle of November but very scarce later.

ABUNDANCE OF LITTLE OWLS IN NORFOLK.—We are informed that on an estate—of 4,300 acres—on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk, 151 Little Owls (*Athene n. vidalii*) were killed in 1926, and 77 in 1928.

STORM-PETRELS IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND SOMERSET.—Capt. H. L. Cochrane informs us that a Storm-Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) was picked up dead in the middle of a small spinney at Whaddon on November 28th, 1928. The bird proved on dissection to be a male. The stomach contained no traces of any food whatever.

The Rev. C. J. Pring writes us that a Storm-Petrel was picked up dead in a garden at West Coker, near Yeovil, on November 29th, 1928. Both these birds appear to have been blown inland by storms at this time.