LETTERS.

ALPINE CHOUGH WITH MALFORMED BILL.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—In connexion with Mr. J. Bartholomew's observation of a Blackbird reaching maturity with a deformed bill (Vol. XXI., p. 69), a somewhat similar case has come under my notice this winter. In this case it is an Alpine Chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) whose upper mandible crosses the lower on the right side.

This Chough is one of several which come daily to my window here for food. I find that cheese is an irresistible attraction for them. The bird has some difficulty in picking up the food but is very persistent, and is less shy than the others. J. B. WATSON.

ST. MORITZ, *Feb. 2nd*, 1929.

SONG-PERIOD OF THE CORN-BUNTING.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—With reference to Mrs. Seton-Gordon's note on this subject (*antea*, p. 210), exigencies of space demanded rigorous compression in the Field-notes in the *Practical Handbook*, with perhaps consequent ambiguity at times. February and October were not cited as rigidly limiting the period of the Corn-Bunting's song, but rather as indicating the season of its main manifestation. In the Chiltern country, although the mean winter temperature is lower than in Skye, where Mrs. Seton-Gordon's birds were singing in early December, the jangling notes may be heard, although with no regularity, during the winter months, as I remarked some time ago in this magazine (Vol. XVI., p. 292). Given milder climatic conditions and a district where the Corn-Bunting is a permanent resident, it may be that winter song is more frequent. From January 13th to the 20th this year I was in the Land's End peninsula, and every morning I heard one or two singing in a half-hearted way. CHAS. OLDHAM.

MORTALITY AMONG WRENS.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—In reference to Col. J. M. Rogers's query (*antea*, p. 212), I suggest that starvation is the cause of death, from suppression of insect life. At Picket Hill, New Forest, on January 15th, 1926, the thermometer went down to 17°F., with snow. Snow fell on 16th and 17th, accumulating to 5 inches, while the thermometer never rose to 32°. On 18th the thermometer rose to 34°, and when clearing snow from the path outside the creeper-covered wall of the backyard here, six dead Wrens were found in it, all within a few feet of one another. They must have dropped dead out of the creepers into the snow. They showed no injury, but seemed to me thin. The cold had been very severe, but I am inclined to attribute their death to starvation, due to every sort of insect seeking cover. I attribute the disastrous effects of prolonged frosts on the Dartford Warbler to the same cause.

T. G. LONGSTAFF.

[Col. Rogers states that the Wrens were all fat and appeared in excellent condition. It would be interesting to examine critically by dissection birds found dead under similar circumstances.—EDS.]

WRENS ROOSTING IN MARTINS' NESTS.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—At dusk on January 13th, 1929, I watched at least twenty-five Wrens going to roost together on our house in West Sussex. They all arrived within a few minutes in twos and threes. The majority went into two or three Martins' nests about twenty-five feet from the ground (on the most sheltered side of the house).

The previous night (January 12th–13th) had been very cold. On several evenings before and after this date I saw a few Wrens going to roost, but could not be sure how many had already arrived.

W. D. SHAW.

"WING-CLAPPING."

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—After reading Mr. Coward's article (*antea*, p. 134) and subsequent letters on the subject of "Wing-Clapping," I decided to carry out a simple experiment to further the proving of this matter.

I obtained a domestic Pigeon, and on the upper-surface of one wing I secured a piece of very fine, white, tissue paper, punctured with holes to offer less resistance when the bird was in flight. On the other wing I placed a small piece of cotton-wool, which had been moistened with ink. I then liberated the bird in a large empty room, not allowing it to settle until recapture. When the bird rose I at once noticed that, instead of the customary sharp, distinct clap, it made a rather dull, muffled sound, and, on examination, I found that the paper was besmirched with ink. This experiment was carried out three times with the same result, thus proving, I think, pretty conclusively, that the wings make contact in flight, or, at least, at the moments of rising or settling.

REGINALD WAGSTAFFE.

SOUTHPORT, *February 6th*, 1929.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—With reference to the notes on "Wing-Clapping" (*antea*, pp. 134, 171, 218) no one has mentioned the Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) in this connexion, though Mr. Coward refers to its "wing-clapping" in *The Birds of the British Isles*. In an article of mine on this bird in the *Irish Naturalist* (October, 1917) I recorded how both sexes regularly "wing-clap" in the breeding-season. In the article itself I make no reference to the sound being made on the up or down stroke, but in my diary I find the note "up, as if hitting the branches." This must not by any means be taken as "up, striking together." The wing-beats of the species are slow, and even after ten years my recollection is clear enough to rule out the idea of the clap resulting from the wings being struck together vertically. In my article I once use the loose expression "clapping his wings together," but the word "together" was not intended and should have been omitted.

In regard to the Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europæus*) and Mr. Coward's article (*antea*, p. 134) I find that in the *Irish Naturalist* (October, 1916) I refer to the clap as being "made upwards in flight."

JAS. P. BURKITT.