

## MIGRATION ROUTES OF WOOD-PIGEONS IN WORCESTERSHIRE.

BY

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FOR a number of years I have been interested in the migratory movements of birds in the valley of the Stour in north-west Worcestershire and have records which tend to show that the Wood-Pigeon (*Columba p. palumbus*) makes very definite autumnal migrations in a south-westerly direction through this valley. Circumstances have not left me free to give the necessary attention every autumn and my records are not as complete over the period under review as I now see they might have been, but are, I think, sufficient to warrant the keeping of closer watch in future years with a view to working out particulars of the movement.

My first note is for the year 1912, when on October 31st I write "many flocks Wood-Pigeons passed on east side of village (Cookley) going to south-west. Their flight was direct, in compact order and at a great height. Thousands must have passed between daybreak and 9 a.m., as they were in large companies, about 100 in some, and these were passing every two or three minutes."

In 1913 the following records were made:—

Oct. 27th.—"Flocks of Wood-Pigeons passing morning."

Nov. 5th.—"This morning from daybreak flocks of Wood-Pigeons began to move across the east side of village, averaging about fifty in a flock. This was kept up at intervals of a few minutes until 9 a.m. Afterwards the flocks became fewer and smaller. The line of flight was exactly as in the case of those I saw on October 31st last year."

In 1914 I have a note mentioning a passage of Wood-Pigeons at 7.30 a.m. on November 3rd.

I am unable to trace any record for 1915, but several entries were made in 1916 as follows:—

Oct. 28th.—"Large flocks Wood-Pigeons passing south-west on east side."

Oct. 30th.—"More Wood-Pigeons."

Oct. 31st.—"Several flocks Wood-Pigeons early morning, usual route."

Nov. 4th.—"More Wood-Pigeons."

Nov. 9th.—"Great migratory movement of birds, especially of Wood-Pigeons. The Pigeons came along soon after

daylight in large flocks of 200-300 and were passing to south-west for two hours. At one time I saw a great stream which I estimated to be more than a mile long and of very considerable width. They mostly passed east side of my house as usual."

Nov. 12th.—"Wood-Pigeons continue to south-west each morning."

From this time until 1924 written notes are not available. In 1924 my notes show the passing of Wood-Pigeons much later than I had usually seen them. At any rate I have nothing until November 19th, when I write: "Large flocks Wood-Pigeons going south-west."

Nov. 20th.—"Wood-Pigeons going west. I have not previously seen any westerly flight."

Nov. 21st.—"Wood-Pigeons going west in good numbers. Also flocks going usual south-west route."

Nov. 27th.—"Several large flocks Wood-Pigeons going south-west meeting a south wind, flying lower than when calm and tacking 8 a.m. Heavy rain previous twenty-four hours."

Dec. 1st.—"Large flocks Wood-Pigeons going south-west. Morning."

Dec. 11th.—"Wood-Pigeons on south-west track."

In 1925 I have one brief note:—

Nov. 6th.—"Wood-Pigeons flying south-west at 8 a.m."

On November 5th, 1927, I have a long note, summing up apparently what I then thought of the movement, as follows: "This morning, being calm and of that quiet softness peculiar to a few days just at this season, there were thousands of Wood-Pigeons passing here to south-west as I have seen them passing every autumn in varying numbers for many years. They began at daylight and continued until about 8.30 a.m. It is a most distinct migration and one which could be easily observed over the country."

It is interesting to see a local Wood-Pigeon "flying the opposite way to the migratory flocks; the local bird flies rapidly and feverishly while the migrants have steadied down to a moderate speed, notwithstanding there is a sort of 'carry on' appearance in their flight."

On November 11th and 12th, 1930, there were many flocks passing at the usual time and in the usual direction. Also on the 11th one flock flying east to west, as was noted on a previous occasion. No return movement has been detected at any time.

I have consulted some of the principal works on migration as well as some general and county works, none of which has much to say regarding the migratory movements of this species. Gätke saw but little of it. Eagle Clarke and A. L. Thomson have only passing references. In the valuable reports of the Migration Committee of the British Ornithologists' Club there are a few references which indicate large movements in various parts of the country, the more significant of which are those of a Warwickshire observer who records for October 31st and a few dates in early November, 1911, many flocks passing Hampton-in-Arden (Avon Valley), the direction mentioned being S.S.W. and time 8 a.m. The Avon Valley lies parallel with this and Hampton-in-Arden some twenty odd miles east of my place of observation.

The recoveries of marked Wood-Pigeons so far recorded by *British Birds* indicate that those bred in this country are more or less sedentary.

Enough has now perhaps been said to show :—

- I. That this autumnal movement, whether local or otherwise, is one which comes definitely into view.
- II. That observations tend to show that this species uses river valleys as flight lines and that it may have flight lines in several directions in this country.
- III. That the movement is often one of large numbers and great extent and takes place under circumstances which render it easy to follow.

[It is well known of course that vast numbers of Wood-Pigeons come into England in autumn and their arrival on the east coast between Northumberland and Norfolk is a well-established fact, though not many detailed observations have actually been published. It has generally been assumed that these swarms soon break up and scatter in smaller flocks to districts where suitable food supplies are abundant. The large numbers and the regularity of the movement recorded by Mr. Beeston suggest that this is not invariably true and that in some parts of the country the roughly east to west migration is continued along well-defined routes. Other observers have probably made notes in past years on the subject and it appears to be one that is worth following up.—Eds.]