

151
LETTERS.

BIRDS LAYING WHILE STILL ATTENDING BROOD FROM
PREVIOUS CLUTCH.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS.—Mr. R. L. BROWN, in his interesting notes on the Kingfisher (*antea*, p. 83), reports a pair of birds having a clutch several days incubated when they had at the same time a brood in an adjacent nest. The experience especially interested me because two cases of the kind have come within my own observations.

The first was in Egypt of a Pallid Shrike (*Lanius excubitor elegans*) having a clutch of eggs about five days incubated when a brood from the previous clutch, which I judged had not been out of the nest more than two or three days, was being attended by the old birds. This was in semi-desert country where small clumps of suitable bushes were few, and there was certainly only the one pair in possession of the territory. The question of bigamy was dismissed as I witnessed more than once the dual task of the female. The two nests were about 15 yards apart.

The second case was a Great Tit (*Parus m. newtoni*) occupying a nest box. Before the young left, four eggs of a second clutch had been laid in the nest. Further details are recorded in Vol. XXIV., p. 75. D. W. MUSSELWHITE.

[Although not many such cases have apparently been recorded the habit is perhaps more frequent than it appears. Mr. B. B. Osmaston noted a case in a Robin in our last number (p. 115), and an instance is referred to by Mr. W. J. Eggeling in his note on the Whinchat in the present issue. I may note here that in June 1926, Mr. N. Tracy showed me at King's Lynn a Redstart (*Phœnicurus phœnicurus*) which had laid five eggs of a second brood and was still feeding the fledged young of the first. This year (1934), at Gracious Pond Farm, Surrey, the first brood of a Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla a. yarvelli*) left the nest on June 8th and on the 16th the hen was feeding them and building a new nest alternately. She did not, in fact, finish this nest, but laid a second clutch in the old nest and had by then stopped feeding the young. At the same place some young Blackbirds (*Turdus m. merula*) left the nest on May 19th and the hen was still feeding them on the 25th when she had nearly completed a new nest, the first egg being laid on the 27th.—H. F. WITHERBY.]

BLACK-HEADED GULLS NESTING IN TREES AT TWIGMOOR.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS.—Mr. A. W. Boyd states (*antea*, p. 117) that a nest of a Black-headed Gull built in the top of a tree "is most unusual". At the gullery on Twigmoor, Lincs., there were several nests high up in pine trees this summer (1934). Col. O. Sutton Nelthorpe, of Scawby Hall, on whose property the gullery is situated, informed me that there are some nests in one particular group of pines every year, though there are plenty of other trees equally suitable round the ponds and, of course, plenty of room on the ground. Some nests are also usually built on the roof of the boathouse and some on a bridge which connects one of the islands with the mainland.

That the habit of building in trees has persisted for at least twenty-five years at Twigmoor is evident on reference to the Rev. F. L. Balthwayt's article on "Lincolnshire Gulleries" in the *Zoologist* for 1909, for he mentions (p. 141) "some of the birds even building on the branches of fir-trees overhanging the water".

W. B. ALEXANDER.

[The Twigmoor colony was founded about 1840 (Kirkman) and was well established by 1843, as recorded by Yarrell. At that time the colony was surrounded by heath land with birch trees and dwarf shrubs. Seebohm, writing in 1885 (*Hist. Brit. Birds*, III., p. 311), quotes W. Becher as stating that within the last fifty years the heath has been planted with larch, oak, pine and birch trees. "Last year", he says, a Gull bred on a dead birch; and "this year" a nest was built on a Scots pine, seven or eight feet from the ground. Since that date nests have been met with on trees here on many occasions. O. Grabham (*Field*, 7th June, 1902) refers to nests on trees on outskirts of colonies: Riley Fortune saw nests in "firs" during a visit described in the *Naturalist*, 1910, p. 95: cf. *Br. B.*, III., p. 379. I have myself visited the locality on three occasions, in 1912, 1913 and 1918. Each time a pair or two were breeding in trees and the keepers reported that this has usually been the case for as long as they could remember. Sometimes a nest was placed on the roof of a low shed near the water. It is clear from this evidence, and that given by Mr. Alexander, that breeding on trees has been known in this gully for at least half a century and it was on these grounds that I wrote in the *Prac. Handbook* that the Black-headed Gull has nested exceptionally "on sheds . . . and on low trees". With the exception of this one locality, I am not aware of any instance of tree building in the British Isles, except that recently recorded by A. W. Boyd. On the Continent, however, it is said to have bred in deserted nests of Rooks and Herons.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]