

## LETTERS.

## SWALLOWS AND BLOOD-STAINED COW'S MILK.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—I have read Mr. A. W. Boyd's "Report on the Swallow Enquiry, 1935" (*antea*, pp. 98/116) with much interest.

In Dumfriesshire, there is a belief that the presence of Swallows in a cow-byre ensures good luck. It is certainly curious that, in 1932, Swallows failed to build—for the first time in many years—in a cottager's byre and that his cow should, after yielding blood-streaked milk, have gone dry altogether.

HUGH GLADSTONE

CAPENOCH, PENFONT, DUMFRIES.

September 4th, 1936.

[It is just possible that there is a grain of truth in the old superstition that the disturbance of Swallows causes cows to give blood-stained milk, a wide-spread belief to which reference was made in the Swallow enquiry (*antea*, p. 108). Mastitis, or inflammation of the quarters of a cow's udder, is due to bacterial infection. Mr. C. N. Jones, M.R.C.V.S., with whom I have discussed this, assures me that the infection in summer is largely fly-borne and that mastitis is most prevalent in August when flies are most abundant. It may also be spread by milking an infected cow and then another immediately after, but it seems clear that flies are the most active agents of infection. A reduction in the Swallow population might therefore have some slight effect on the incidence of summer mastitis but it is difficult to believe that the desertion of one particular farmstead would be of serious importance at a time when cattle are living in the meadows, unless it was part of a general reduction of the Swallow population of the district.

In Cheshire I have on numerous occasions come across another superstition in connection with this disease. It is quite customary when a cow has mastitis to milk it straight on to the floor of the shippon instead of using a bucket; this, of course, gives the flies their chance and increases the need of protection for Swallows, if, as seems possible, their presence is of value. It is almost impossible to stop this objectionable custom, which is on a par with the equally evil custom of hanging up a dead calf to stop contagious abortion in cattle; it was only yesterday that I heard that this latter superstition was still believed in and practised.—A. W. BOYD.]

REPORTED BREEDING OF FULMAR AND MANX  
SHEARWATER IN PEMBROKESHIRE.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—Mr. W. A. Cadman has brought forward some evidence that the Fulmar Petrel (*Fulmarus g. glacialis*) bred in Pembrokeshire in 1935 (*antea*, p. 133), and the Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus p. puffinus*) on the Pembrokeshire mainland in 1936 (*antea*, p. 175), but I venture to suggest that the evidence is not conclusive. With regard to the Fulmar, I have interviewed the coastguard mentioned, and was not able to get absolutely satisfactory proof from him of its breeding. In common with other observers I have watched the progress of this colony of non-breeding birds at the Stack Rocks with some interest, and though no doubt they will breed in time, it seems certain that they have not done so up to the present.

With regard to the Manx Shearwater, this bird is heard screaming at night at most places along the Pembrokeshire coast from St. Davids south to Amroth, and as a result it has been credited with having bred at various places, *e.g.*, Marloes (where birds have been found in rabbit burrows by ferreters, as Mr. Cadman found near St. Govan's), Linney Head and Amroth. I have *heard* of eggs being found at these three places, but until they are so found, or the young discovered, by a competent observer, the question must remain open. The remains of Shearwaters which have been killed by gulls at sea and carried or blown inland are of course commonly picked up along the whole of the Pembrokeshire coast.

R. M. LOCKLEY.