

LETTERS.

CUCKOO CALLING WITH BILL OPEN.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—In *Songs of Wild Birds* (1936) Mr. Nicholson states on page 10 and again on page 165 that the Cuckoo (*Cuculus c. canorus*) habitually calls with his bill shut. In connexion with this statement the following observation may be of interest.

On June 5th, 1931, while watching a brood of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers near Utrecht, Holland, it happened that a Cuckoo alighted on a dead branch near my hiding-place, where it stayed calling for rather a long time. Remembering having read in A. Thorburn's *British Birds* (1925) that the Cuckoo calls with his bill shut "as when a pigeon coos", I paid special attention to this calling Cuckoo, which I could observe at ease with powerful 10x binoculars under excellent light conditions so that I could see every detail.

I quite distinctly saw that this particular Cuckoo opened and shut his bill at each call, though he did it very quickly and only opened the bill a little at each call.

FR. HAVERSCHMIDT.

HAARLEM, HOLLAND.

[I used the word "habitually" on purpose instead of "always" or "most often" because although a number of observers such as the late A. Thorburn and Philip Rickman state that they have repeatedly verified that the cuckoo calls with its bill closed, I myself have seen it call with open as well as with closed bill. I know of no information which would enable us at present to decide the relative frequency of the two practices, and suggest that the point would repay more widespread observation.—E.M.N.]

WOODLAND BIRD ENQUIRY.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—The woodland bird enquiry of the British Trust for Ornithology has been progressing well, and we are very grateful to all observers who have been taking part. The results are working out satisfactorily except that we still have too few counts in pure beech and pure birch woods to make really sound comparison with the large number of figures for other types. For this reason the enquiry is being extended to June, 1937, after which it definitely closes. Hence any other observers who could help in the enquiry would be very welcome, and a schedule will be sent to them on request.

I might mention again that the counts are comparatively simple to take and do not involve census work, and that they are required for this winter (up till mid-February, 1937) and also for the summer of 1937. Counts for beech and birch will be specially welcome, but all unmixed types of wood are of interest.

THE SCHOOL, DARTINGTON HALL, TOTNES.

DAVID LACK.

December, 9th, 1936.