

REVIEWS

The Gannet: a Bird with a History. By J. H. Gurney, F.L.S.
pp. lii., 568. Many illustrations. Witherby and Co.
27s. 6d. net.

MR. J. H. GURNEY'S monograph forms an attractive volume of some 568 pages, copiously illustrated with maps and reproductions from photographs, diagrams, etc. There are also two coloured plates, one of which illustrates the nestling, while the other represents the eggs of this species. The statement on the title page and repeated on pp. xv. and 368, that the figure of the young Gannet is drawn or repainted by Joseph Wolf is however due to a misapprehension. It is in fact reproduced from the original water-colour sketch by Dr. Cunningham and bears no trace of Wolf's master hand. The figure, reversed and re-drawn by Wolf, appeared in the *Ibis* for 1866, pl. i., and will repay careful comparison.

The great value of Mr. Gurney's work lies in the careful investigation which the author has carried out into the history of each colony. Most of our knowledge of the birds of our own country only dates from about a century ago, and we owe a deep debt of gratitude to Dr. Cunningham, Professor Newton, and Mr. Gurney for the careful and painstaking way in which they have traced out the historical references buried in the ancient "Inventories" in the Record Office and in the works of long-forgotten writers of the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Few ornithologists combine the qualities or training necessary for success in this kind of investigation, and we are the more grateful to Mr. Gurney for collecting and digesting this valuable material so as to make it accessible to all.

Perhaps we may be allowed to add to the list of Naturalists who have visited the Bass (p. 255) the name of Ernst Fleischer, a personal friend of the Naumanns and publisher of their works, as well as those of "Fugle" Faber. He paid his visit at the end of June, 1820, and it was from him that Naumann obtained the information which he incorporated in his great work.

No light is thrown on the question as to what is the cause of the disappearance of the great majority of the young Gannets during the first year or so of their existence and their consequent scarcity at the great breeding-stations. It is however a curious coincidence that immature birds should be most numerous at the most inaccessible of our British

colonies. When passing near the Stack of "Stack and Skerry" in 1912 we noticed a much larger proportion of these immature birds than at the Bass, and the same fact was also noted by Mr. Harvie-Brown and Professor Newton. No ornithologist has ever landed on this islet, and the occasional visits of fishermen are now apparently abandoned altogether.

The large breeding-station on Eldey (p. 284) is treated somewhat briefly. Professor Newton's sketch gives a good idea of the appearance of this remarkable rock, except that the droppings of the birds cause the almost perpendicular walls to appear white instead of dark as shown in the sketch. We were informed in 1912 that stanchions are now fixed in the rock and that the Gannet harvest is now regularly worked from the Westmann Islands, so that it should not be difficult to obtain details of the colony. Whether the Geirfugladrangr is also tenanted by a large colony seems rather questionable, but there seems reason to suppose that Grimsey is not the only breeding-place in north Iceland. Mr. Gurney refers to Drangey as situated on the north-east of Iceland (p. 288) but this is incorrect, as it lies half-way down the Skagafjördr, nearly two degrees west of Grimsey. The note in Slater's *Manual of the Birds of Iceland* (p. 37) is obviously carelessly written, for he states his belief in the existence of another colony "on, or near, Cape Reykjanes, the north-east point of Iceland." The north-east point is Cape Langanes. Reykjanes lies on the south-west and is not far from the Fuglasker and Eldey.

Detailed accounts are given of each of the fifteen known breeding-stations of this species on both sides of the Atlantic and on pp. 324-325 Mr. Gurney gives an estimate of the numbers present at the beginning of the breeding-season. The figures given are naturally only approximate, but are in most cases rather below than above the mark, and the total of 101,000 probably represents tolerably accurately the Gannet population of the North Atlantic.

Mr. Gurney then proceeds to deal with the life-history of the Gannet and begins appropriately with the nest and egg. We do not understand why the green colour of the shell should be attributed on Mr. Drane's authority to "transmitted light" (p. 343). The egg-shells of all the Gannets, Cormorants, and Shags are pale bluish-green in colour, but this colour is to a great extent concealed by a calcareous outer deposit. As the shell is not perfectly opaque, the ground-colour is naturally visible when viewed from within and held up to the light, but where there is a defective patch in the outer

deposit, the ground-colour is plainly apparent externally, and its presence is not due to the action of light in any way. Calcium carbonate is rather more than a "valuable ingredient" in the formation of an egg-shell, and would be more aptly described as "*the* main ingredient" of both egg-shells and fish bones. A list is given on p. 357 of the principal figures published of Gannet's eggs. The best I have seen is that by Mr. H. Grönvold (*The British Bird Book*, IV., Egg plate v., fig. 3), but this is not mentioned in Mr. Gurney's list. It is one of the most curious and significant facts in the history of this species, that though Gesner in 1555 recorded the fact that the Gannet incubates its egg by covering it with its webbed feet, yet Howard Saunders, writing as late as 1884, spoke of the bird's "supposed habit of hatching its egg with its foot!"

Reference has recently been made in this journal (*antea*, p. 99) to the long incubation period of this species, and interesting details as to the treatment of the young are given by Mr. Gurney, but the remarkable greeting formalities are somewhat briefly dismissed, and we are told nothing of the courtship display, a subject on which information seems to be almost entirely lacking. The list of inland occurrences in Great Britain (p. 443) might be considerably extended. Thus for Berkshire two are here recorded on Mr. Clark Kennedy's authority, but six are now known to have been actually obtained: for Notts Mr. Whitaker has noted over a dozen occurrences instead of nine, and Derbyshire (six obtained and others seen), Staffordshire (3 at least), Warwick (4), Herts (3), Bucks (2) and several other inland counties might have been added to the list. Similarly the lists of Continental occurrences, which are admittedly not exhaustive, are rather deceptive. On p. 36 three occurrences in Italy are mentioned, but in the last list of Count Arrigoni degli Oddi, eighteen are recorded from Italy alone, as well as others from Sicily and Sardinia.

Some notes on the anatomy and osteology of this species are given in the last chapters of the work, and in appendices there are interesting notes on the other species of the Genus *Sula*, the parasites which have been found infesting them, and on historic and prehistoric remains.

A somewhat formidable list of notanda and corrigenda occupies pp. xlvii.-li., and might have been still further extended. This is partly due to the difficulty of avoiding errors in quotations from obscure Danish and Early English sources. For example the reference to Winge's paper, "Om jørdfundne Fugle fra Danmark," on p. 559 contains

at least four typographical errors, and other similar cases might be pointed out. In the references to the literature of the subject also we think that more definiteness might be expected, and it is irritating to find Seebohm's *History of British Birds*, Lilford's *Coloured Figures of the Birds of the British Islands*, the Fourth Edition of "Yarrell," and Macgillivray's *History of British Birds* all quoted as "*British Birds*." Seebohm's *Coloured Figures of the Eggs of British Birds* is barely recognizable as the "Abridged Edition, 1896," of the same writer's "*History of British Birds*." A brief Bibliography of the subject is given on pp. 13-15, but even here the titles are unnecessarily compressed in some cases. There seems no adequate reason why the title of Lacepède and Daudin's work should be omitted, and "Muller, Færoenes Fug." would be more intelligible if printed in full. Seebohm's account of the Bass based on his own and E. V. Seebohm's notes made in 1870 and 1883 is at least as worthy of a place in this list as Lord Lilford's casual notes on the Gannet, which are prefaced by the remark that he has never visited a breeding-station of this species. Hantzsch's *Vogelwelt Islands*, though referred to in the text is omitted from this list, and Mr. F. B. Kirkman's article in the *British Bird Book* should also have been included, as it contains the fullest account of the breeding-habits and displays of this species yet published. On the other hand some of the works mentioned, such as the *Vertebrate Fauna of the Tay Area*, contain next to nothing on the subject.

The work is a valuable contribution to ornithology, not merely on account of its positive results, which are considerable, but also in that it points out many departments in which our knowledge is still defective. It is well got up, and the series of photographs illustrating nearly all the breeding-stations, is a most valuable and interesting one. We congratulate the author on the results of his work and trust that he will follow it up by further investigations into the history of our other great sea-bird colonies which still await an historian.

F.C.R.J.

Report on Scottish Ornithology in 1912 including Migration.

By Leonora Jeffrey Rintoul and Evelyn V. Baxter.
Oliver and Boyd. 1s. 6d. net.

WE congratulate the authors on this admirable work, which is the second yearly report to be published separately. It is arranged in the same excellent way as the last report so that all the information it contains is easily available for

reference. Many of the more important records have been referred to from time to time in our pages, but a good many interesting items are here published for the first time and to the most important of these we draw attention below. All the dates are in the year 1912.

- CARRION-CROW (*Corvus c. corone*).—Three at the Flannans (Outer Hebrides), November 2nd.
- MEALY REDPOLL (*Carduelis l. linaria*).—Eighteen at the Flannans, October 24th.
- WOOD-LARK (*Lullula a. arborea*).—One at Auskerry (Orkney), October 26th.
- SCANDINAVIAN ROCK-PIPIT (*Anthus s. littoralis*).—One at Pentland Skerries (Orkney), May 9th.
- YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla f. rayi*).—Two at Fair Isle, May 6th, and one May 7th.
- WHITE WAGTAIL (*M. a. alba*).—A pair bred at Grimista (Shetland).
- RED-BACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius c. collurio*).—Single birds at Fair Isle in June and August and at the Pentland Skerries on June 2nd (three), 3rd, and 4th.
- WAXWING (*Ampelis garrulus*).—One at Stornoway (Outer Hebrides), November 12th.
- BARRED WARBLER (*Sylvia n. nisoria*).—In addition to all those already recorded for 1912, one was procured at Auskerry on August 15th.
- BLACKCAP (*S. a. atricapilla*).—One at Auskerry, December 6th.
- LESSER WHITETHROAT (*S. c. curruca*).—Small numbers at Pentland Skerries in May, a good many June 2nd to 6th, and small numbers from September 19th to October 9th.
- RING-OUZEL (*Turdus t. torquatus*).—Two at Tarbatness (Ross-shire), December 3rd.
- WHINCHAT (*Saxicola r. rubetra*).—One near Cramond Bridge, February 25th.
- BLACK REDSTART (*Phœnicurus o. gibraltariensis*).—One at Pentland Skerries May 7th (and another on May 9th, see *Bull. B.O.C.*, XXXII. p. 177), one at Tarbatness November 6th, one at Fair Isle March 22nd (besides April 25th already mentioned in Vol. VI., p. 351).
- RED-SPOTTED BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica* ? subsp.).—One at Fair Isle, May 10th.
- CONTINENTAL REDBREAST (*Dandalus r. rubecula*).—One at Mull of Galloway, October 11th. A "rush" occurred at the end of October and those examined from Pentland Skerries were of this form.
- WRYNECK (*Jynx t. torquilla*).—Two at Fair Isle, August 22nd, and two at Pentland Skerries, August 30th.
- ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD (*Buteo l. lagopus*).—One at Loch Gower, Wigtownshire, March 14th.
- GADWALL (*Anas strepera*).—Two at Fair Isle, April 19th.
- SMEW (*Mergus albellus*).—Quite a number reported in January and February of which one was at Bressay (Shetland).
- TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia t. turtur*).—Occurred at Fair Isle, May, June, July, and September; at Isle of May, May, June, and August; in Outer Hebrides and Ross-shire, September.
- DOTTEREL (*Charadrius morinellus*).—A nest was found in June in Forfarshire—the first for the county.
- SPOTTED REDSHANK (*Tringa erythropus*).—One at Largo Bay (Fife), July 15th.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa*).—In Kirkeudbrightshire, two August, two September, one October, and one December; one in Inverness-shire, September.

LITTLE AUK (*Alle alle*).—A good account is given of the great visitation in the winter of 1911-12.

CAPERCAILLIE × BLACKCOCK.—Hybrid shot in Argyllshire more resembled the first-named species. H.F.W.

I. *Guide to Selborne.* II. *Synopsis of the Life of Gilbert White.* By W. H. Mullens. Being No. CXC of the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club.* Witherby. 2s. 6d. net.

OWING to the lamented death of Dr. Sclater, the proposed expedition of the British Ornithologists' Club to Selborne did not take place. The "Guide to Selborne" and "Synopsis of the Life of Gilbert White," which had been prepared for the occasion by Mr. W. H. Mullens, appear, however, as a special number of the *Bulletin*. There is no one at the present time more versed in "Selborniana" than Mr. Mullens, and the pamphlet under review maintains the authoritative standard of his previous publications on the subject. In the twenty-seven pages there is given a mass of information, duly corroborated by references, which testifies to the patience and research of the writer, while an appreciation of *The Natural History of Selborne*, occupying the last seven pages, is tempered with kindly, but just, criticism. Certain individuals will always be regarded as factors in the world's progress of thought, and as such the name of Gilbert White will ever be held in high honour. Newton has said that, "more than half the Zoologists of the British Islands for the past eighty years or more have been infected with their love of the study by Gilbert White, and it can hardly be supposed that his influence will cease" (*Dictionary of Birds* (1893-96), Introduction, p. 19). Mr. Mullens, as has already been stated, is well qualified to write of Selborne and its parson, and one really wonders if there is yet anything more to be discovered about this interesting personage. Although no authentic picture of Gilbert White is known, notwithstanding recent rumours to the contrary, we have to thank Mr. Mullens for as graphic, yet concise, a description of this naturalist's home and personality as it is possible for pen and ink to give in so short a space.

H.S.G.