

BIRD-MIGRATION BY THE OVERLAND ROUTE BETWEEN KILLALA BAY AND GALWAY BAY.

BY

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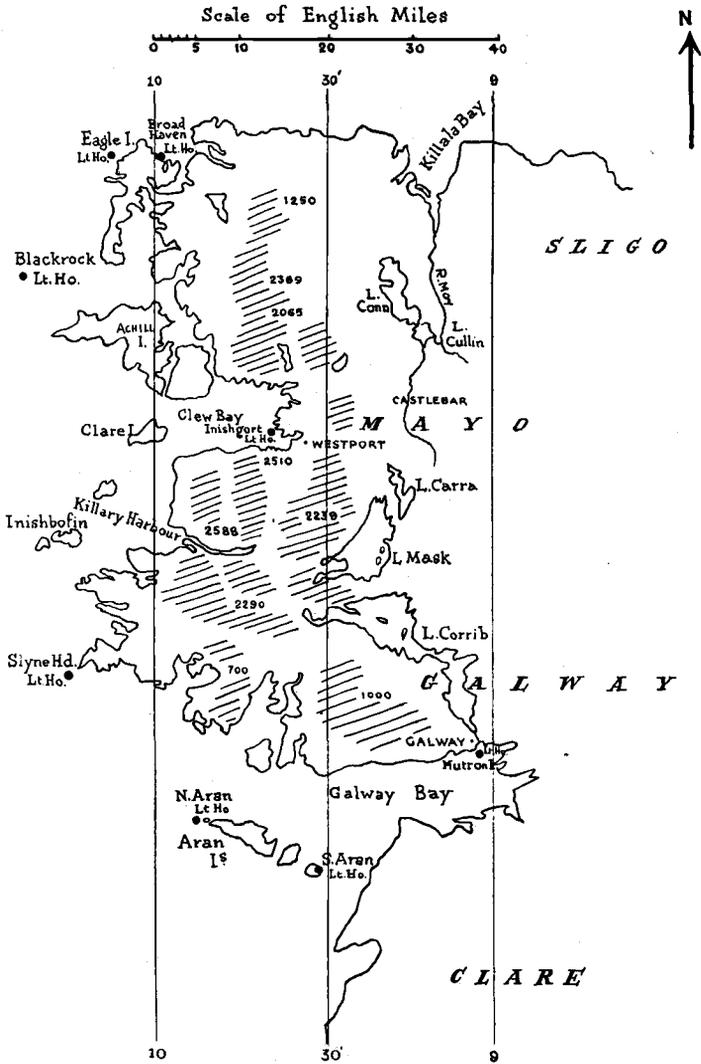
A GLANCE at the map of Ireland will show that a large portion of Connaught protrudes to the west of Longitude West 9° . At the northern end no part of Ireland is again touched, though the Donegal coast is not far to eastward of the line. At the southern end (so far as Connaught is concerned) there is Galway Bay opening into the Atlantic.

Between Longitude W. 9° and W. $9^{\circ}30'$ lies the line of overland migration to which these notes refer (*cf.* map). At its northern extremity lies the large bay of Killala which leads almost to Loughs Conn and Cullin. Farther south of them, at no great distance, lies the chain of lakes—Carra, Mask and Corrib, the latter joined to Galway Bay by only a short river. A very definite topographical line is formed, running roughly north and south. The distance from the mouth of Killala Bay to Galway Bay is about 75 miles in a direct line. The country to the west of the great expanses of lake is mountainous, beyond which is the sea at an average approximate distance of 30 miles.

The late Robert Warren hinted at the use of this route and was sure of it as a migration route for Skuas. Ussher (*Birds of Ireland*) refers to the route as being used by wildfowl, and again (*Irish Naturalist*, 1905, p. 125) he writes of it as a possible route for wildfowl wishing to avoid the dangerous Atlantic Coast. Ussher's remarks are quoted by W. Eagle Clarke (*Studies of Bird Migration*, Vol. I., p. 99). These references are with regard to the route in connexion with wildfowl.

In my opinion this route is far more generally used as a regular and habitual line of migration in the case not only of wildfowl and waders, but also of other species both as they travel along our western seaboard and as they enter the counties of Mayo and Galway.

Having had exceptional opportunities of studying the movement of birds in all weathers on these lakes I give the following notes which are the result of observations covering many years. I believe that both wildfowl and waders use this route not only when the weather is bad on the wild Atlantic coast, but also when the weather is such that it would in no way inconvenience them there.



SKY-LARK (*Alauda arvensis*).—Sky-Larks certainly cross inland by this route in autumn. I have noted the immigration and migratory movement in October, 1921. Large numbers were then seen passing north and it is interesting to note that the observations of lightkeepers show a northward movement at the same time.

In 1917 on October 6th, I personally observed the movement inland near the chain of lakes. These birds may well have entered by Galway Bay since Mr. Glanville, lightkeeper at Mutton Island in Galway Bay, noted that, from October 6th to 17th flocks of larks were passing north all day. The weather was clear and hence the birds were not apparently avoiding the sea coast as being dangerous.

Again in 1920 I noted the movement on October 7th. Lightkeepers to the south of the chain of lakes reported large numbers on migration. Thus, Fastnet reported: "Larks in numbers at the lantern, over a score being killed on the night of October 9th-10th. On 17th there were more round the light along with hundreds of Redwings and other birds." Farther north, in Galway Bay, North Aran reported Sky-Larks killed (and some were sent to me) on the nights of October 11th, 16th and 17th. Slyne Head reported a few Sky-Larks about the rock on October 3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th and 9th. Blackrock, Inishgort and Broadhaven made no mention of larks and these three stations are to the west of the inland route. Hence the majority of Sky-Larks would appear to have gone inland before reaching Slyne Head and would almost certainly have done so from Galway Bay, to go northward by the overland route.

The movement was again evident during the first week of October, 1924, and on September 23rd, 1928, with wind nil and haze, Sky-Larks were passing northwards over Lough Carra from 7.30 a.m. solar time. I also have a note for October 8th, 1932. (Cf. Eagle Clarke, *Studies in Bird Migration*, Vol. I., p. 226, regarding autumn immigration from Central Europe.)

PIED WAGTAIL (*Motacilla a. yarrellii*).—I have several notes which point to a passage movement via the lakes in autumn.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*M. a. alba*).—Robert Warren frequently met with the White Wagtail in Killala Bay. I have a record of this Wagtail from a lightkeeper who was acquainted with the bird and secured specimens for me at Mutton Island in Galway Bay in 1917. In 1916 he noted a definite movement of these birds in autumn flying S. by E. and in spring N. by W. which would bring them from and to the lower half of Lough Corrib. Weather fine at the time. On September 22nd, 1928, I shot an adult female on rocks in Lough Carra from a party of five. The specimen was identified by Williams of Dublin and at the Natural History Museum in London in confirmation. The weather at the time was fine with light easterly breeze.

BLACKCAP (*Sylvia a. atricapilla*).—Blackcaps have been seen occasionally on the islands of Loughs Mask and Carra, but proof of breeding there is wanting. The Blackcap is a regular summer visitor to Castlebar, which is to the north of these two lakes, and, as it has been found farther north in Mayo, not far removed from the chain of lakes, it seems possible that the birds reach these localities along this route.

REDWING (*Turdus musicus*).—I have evidence that Redwings use this route when arriving in the autumn and on passage. There are other movements at the same time, however, notably immigration from Clew Bay, but the movement via the lakes is easily identified. Proof was most striking in October, 1920. On 13th of that month Redwings were very scarce in Mayo east of the lakes whereas they were

very numerous bordering the lakes, and on the shores. By the 15th Redwings had decreased everywhere, and it appears that this "rush" was of passage birds. This is substantiated by reports from lightkeepers, which show a great rush of Redwings about that time.

North Aran, 16.10.20, 3 killed. Wind NE. 4. Very dark.

Ditto, 17.10.20, 50 killed. Wind NE. 3. Very dark.

South Aran, 12.10.20. A great rush. 20 killed. Flying SE. Drizzle.

Fastnet, 16.10.20 and 18.10.20. About 100 killed.

Specimens were sent in each case.

Slyne Head reported on October 11th: "Several Thrushes about, light." Possibly Redwings.

Broadhaven, Inishgort and Mutton Island make no mention of the rush and no Redwing or "Thrush" entry. Slyne Head, Broadhaven and Inishgort lie on the coast west of the overland route. Weather inland at the time, fair.

SWALLOW (*Hirundo r. rustica*).—Evidently Swallows use this route in autumn when departing as I noticed a marked southward movement taking place over Lough Carra on September 17th, 1920, and on the previous day two were seen flying south, in a determined manner, during misty showers. Some of the movements in autumn are distinctly perplexing. It seems strange that the general movement, when Swallows are absent from the surrounding country, is north and north-east over the lakes. I have several notes for the end of September of a determined flight of Swallows in those directions. Their absence from the adjacent countryside and their presence in hundreds on telegraph wires between Loughs Mask and Carra seems to point to use of this overland route.

MARTIN (*Delichon u. urbica*).—A few observations in autumn seem to point to this bird as a passage-migrant by this route.

SAND-MARTIN (*Riparia r. riparia*).—Most certainly the Sand-Martin migrates by this route, not only in autumn, but also in spring. I have many entries which point to such movement, but of all the most pronounced was that over Lough Mask on August 20th and 21st, 1917. On the former date I observed hundreds flying south, the movement being particularly noticeable in the morning, falling off in the afternoon, and had practically ceased by 5 p.m. On some bare rocks in the lake they were collecting in hundreds, while many passed on over the mountains to the south towards Lough Corrib. On 21st the movement was still in progress, especially about 11 a.m. and again from 2 p.m. until 3.30 p.m.

In 1924, so early as March 19th, during very fine weather I observed Sand-Martins between Lough Mask and Lough Carra, making northwards; evidently either entering the country or passing northward by this route.

The fact that Sand-Martins are so seldom reported, or sent from our Mayo and Galway light stations and so seldom even seen on the seaboard of those counties and their isles during migration, seems to point to the fact that they use this overland route in passing to and from their more northern breeding haunts, and also when arriving in and departing from Mayo and Galway.

SWIFT (*Apus a. apus*).—I think the Swift may be included in this list, but the movements are somewhat confusing.

OYSTER-CATCHER (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*).—A flock of 15 seen going south low over Lough Carra in the late evening of July 22nd, 1924, could hardly have been doing anything but using the lakes as a line of flight, if not of migration. I have the following additional notes of a bird which does not normally frequent our inland

lakes. One going north over Lough Mask, May 4th, 1932 ; one flying high to south over Lough Mask, July 14th, 1932, light northerly breeze ; one flying low over water going south, Lough Mask, July 23rd, 1932, strong west wind, misty rain ; one going north, August 20th, 1932. Four came from north and rested on shore of Lough Mask, September 21st, 1932.

RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*).—There is certainly at any rate a local north to south and vice-versa movement by this route.

GOLDEN PLOVER (*Charadrius apricarius*).—I have record of birds of this species flying south in flocks low over the waters of Lough Carra in October. They were passing almost all day in the face of a southerly gale. I have also notes of stray birds obviously migrating.

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*).—Warren saw a single bird on an island in the middle of Lough Mask in June, 1893. Five were noted at about 3 p.m. on August 20th, 1917, and on the following day, during a heavy shower with a high wind, two rested on some rocks quite close to the boat I was in. My brother in another boat, at some distance from me, noticed three Turnstones on rocks much farther south. This was on Lough Mask. A party of twelve passed south at great speed over Lough Mask during a heavy misty shower and west wind on August 23rd, 1924. It is very unusual to meet Turnstones inland in this country.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*).—I have notes of birds almost certainly on passage in autumn. Fair weather on each occasion.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*).—Whimbrels certainly avail themselves of this route regularly on spring and autumn passage. I have observed them passing on migration in all weathers. I have heard them passing over the lakes both north in spring and south in autumn at night, usually during misty weather. These birds are noticeably more plentiful in the vicinity of the chain of lakes than in the other parts of the counties.

BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias niger*).—Warren secured specimens of this tern in autumn in Killala Bay. The occurrence of this rare tern on Loughs Mask and Carra in autumn on no less than four occasions between 1916 and 1921 points to its migration along this route on its occasional visits to this country. From 1916 to 1918 it appeared on Lough Carra each autumn. Weather conditions have, as a rule, been good, and in no case such that one might suppose the birds were avoiding bad weather on the coast. Two reliable observers have noticed this tern passing by on Lough Mask in autumn.

SANDWICH TERN (*Sterna sandvicensis*).—I have but one record of this tern when on August 24th, 1928, I observed one and watched it for about two hours on Lough Carra. As these terns frequent Killala Bay and Galway Bay and breed on Lough Cullin, they quite likely use this route. It is strange that in so many years of careful watching I have only this one observation.

COMMON TERN AND ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna hirundo* and *macrura*) breed on all the lakes composing the string and probably use this route in spring and autumn. I have a few notes of definite movement. August 12th, 1932, eight terns, either Arctic or Common, passed quickly south, low over the water, Lough Mask. August 26th, 1932, heard a tern or terns going south over Lough Mask at 9.45 p.m. (solar time). Dark windy night after a wild evening with wind south.

ARCTIC SKUA (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).—Arctic Skuas use this route in autumn. Warren had no doubt of it. His observations in Killala Bay when large numbers were migrating made their line of flight directly

to the chain of lakes. Of later years my brother and I have observed them on Loughs Mask and Carra in the autumn of 1917 and 1921. In 1917 the weather was very wild.

There are also other species, mostly waders which, to a certain extent, undoubtedly migrate along this great chain of lakes. It is difficult, however, to determine to what extent their migratory movements take place since many breed, such as the Common Sandpiper and Redshank, while more of these birds probably occur on passage and it is hard to distinguish them from the breeding birds. Warblers, Spotted Flycatchers, etc., without doubt enter and leave the counties of Mayo and Galway by this chain of lakes and most probably many pass in spring and autumn to and from farther north since, at the time of arrival and departure, they are far more plentiful on the islands and in the thickets and old woods along the shores than at other times. Geese, Duck and Teal, according to Ussher, who confessed that he had never himself noticed any migratory movement, are said to avail themselves of the route. I have made no personal observations, however, of any marked movement, but have little doubt that such may occur.