

LETTER.

RECOLLECTIONS ABOUT THE OSPREYS AT ACHNACARRY.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS.—As the statement in *The Handbook of British Birds* (Vol. III, p. 109) that the Osprey (*Pandion h. haliaetus*) last bred at Loch Arkaig in 1902 is incorrect this should be corrected.

A pair nested regularly ever since I can remember up to 1908 and thereafter a single bird returned annually up to 1913.

They nested on a small island adjacent to the Chapel Island at the east end of the Loch on the top of an old oak tree which is still existent. As a rule they hatched two or three young birds, more usually two. They used to arrive about the beginning of April and all left towards the end of September. One year there were two pairs. I think that would be about 1899 or 1900. The second pair nested on a tree on a small point on the south side of the Loch near the foot of Glen Camagarry about four miles east from the head of the Loch. The eggs were stolen from this second nest as my father sent a boy up the tree to look into the nest and all he found was a stone shaped like an egg. That year there were no fewer than seven Ospreys flying about the Loch, the two pairs already referred to, two young birds and an old single solitary bird. I have no recollection of this second pair returning but it may have done so for possibly one more year.

The nest on the island was occupied continuously up to 1908, but unfortunately the eggs were stolen nearly every year and it was only occasionally that any young birds were hatched. I cannot remember what was the last year that any young were hatched, but as my wife remembers seeing the young birds and as she was not there before 1907 this must have been either in that year or in 1908. The nest was placed under police protection, the tree was encircled with barbed wire, and a sunk barbed wire fence was put round the island, but all to little avail. After 1908 only one bird returned, whether it was a cock or hen I do not know. This bird used to build up the nest and fly about looking for its mate, which never appeared and then of course made off. This bird came back by itself for five years in succession. Its last appearance was in 1913. It never came back in 1914, which I have always remembered as a sort of omen of the Great War. Curiously enough, during the last year of the last war I was in Ireland and happened to see a stuffed Osprey which was shot there in 1913. I jumped at once to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that this was our last Osprey but, of course, it might have come from anywhere. It was shot in September I think, hence my conclusion it might have been on its journey to its winter quarters.

The Ospreys seldom fished in Loch Arkaig itself and never near their own nest, with the result that the fishing round the islands used then to be about the best in the Loch. They did their fishing further north—most likely in Loch Quoich—as they were often seen coming across by Loch Bhlair, a small Loch half way between Loch Quoich and Loch Arkaig.

I have seen an Osprey on two or three occasions since 1913, but just a passing bird fishing, and I took it to be one of the birds that I understood were nesting on Loch Loyne on the Glen Garry Estate where the late Captain Ellice told me a pair of Ospreys continued to nest for some time after our pair had left me.

My fisherman at Achnacarry has seen an Osprey fishing in Bunarkaig bay in Loch Lochy on two occasions since he came there 7 years ago. The last occasion was in 1941. That would be about the end of May or the beginning of June. He knows the Osprey well, as he used to see them fishing frequently on Loch Fannich near his father's house when he was a boy. That was the pair that used to nest on Loch Luichart years ago, though, there again, the nest was regularly robbed every year.

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