

NOTES.

PRESUMED BIGAMY OF ROOK.

DURING the spring of 1947 I saw what certainly appeared to be bigamous behaviour by a male Rook (*Corvus f. frugilegus*) Unfortunately, the observations were rather disjointed, a continuous watch not being possible.

On March 14th a well-advanced nest was seen in an oak-tree at Lympstone, Devon, and nearly a mile from the nearest rookery. Even on this date a third bird appeared to be interested in the nesting activities. On the 22nd egg-laying had probably at least started, for one bird was in the nest a good deal. On subsequent dates the male, when he brought food to the sitting bird, was followed to the nest by a third bird, which was attacked by the female. On April 4th one bird was in the nest when its mate arrived and they changed places (suggesting, incidentally, that the male Rook, at least occasionally, broods the eggs). The third bird had been perched in a tree about fifty yards away. It flew to the side of the bird that had left the nest and quivered its wings. In the next few minutes it was twice attacked by the sitting bird, which was no doubt the female of the pair, and although the male once showed a little resentment at the odd bird's presence, it refused to leave, only flying away with the male when he left.

On April 11th I found a second nest had been started a few feet from the first, and the third bird was subsequently seen taking material to it. Whenever the male brought food to the sitting female the third bird would stand on its nest, facing the other and calling and fluttering its wings. This became a regular habit and there was no doubt the third bird was a female. On one occasion a bird, almost certainly the male, left his perch by the first nest and went to the second, he and the female of that nest going on to it. These two birds now and then arrived at the tree together, going to their respective nests, and once both took material to the second nest.

The young birds appeared to be hatched in the first nest on April 14th. The male parent left the nest on one occasion and was followed by the second female. They returned together, both going to the second nest. He went into the cup, where the female mounted his back in reversed coition. The positions were then reversed, though she slipped out from under him too quickly, I thought, for coition actually to have taken place. Later both flew to the second nest with material, but something alarmed them before the male could leave his at the nest. He dropped it as he left the tree and on returning went to the first nest. On another occasion he was pecking at food under his foot in a neighbouring tree when the second female left her nest and went to him. He dropped part of the food and she went to the ground to retrieve it, while he took the rest to the first nest and fed the young and the female.

On April 18th the second female was incubating. The next day

the male was again pecking at food in the tree a short way off when she left her nest and flew to him. This time she took part of the food, though in the confusion of fluttering wings I could not be sure whether the male gave it to her or she snatched it from him. He took the rest to the first nest.

On the 21st the second nest was destroyed by a gale and the owner resumed her habit of following the male, this continuing up to at least the 28th. On May 1st she had apparently found another mate, for two birds were building a fresh nest while the original pair was busy with its family. The new nest was also destroyed on the 5th and the second pair of birds left for good.

R. G. ADAMS.

RECENT accounts of the behaviour of Rooks (*Corvus f. frugilegus*) at the nest remind me of a remarkable association noted in April, 1946. The rookery was a small lane-side one near Taunton, Somerset, where I was watching the feeding of incubating females, which took place exactly as described by C. M. Ogilvie (*antea*, Vol. xl, p. 136).

One of the trees of this rookery, across the lane and some 20 yards from the others, contained three nests, two near the top centre of the tree, and one (not involved in this observation) on the far side, so allowing no possibility of confusion. Both hens of the two nests concerned were seen simultaneously giving the characteristic greeting that signifies the approach of the cock, but only one cock could be seen flying in. This bird flew over the first and lower nest, and settled at the upper, where wing shivering and the peculiar mumed cawing of the hen, noted by C. M. Ogilvie, accompanied the feeding. Meanwhile the hen on the lower nest had turned completely round to face the upper nest, and was continuing the "approach-greeting." The cock left the upper nest immediately after feeding the hen, hopped down and across the tree some 6 feet to the lower nest and fed the second hen, the feeding behaviour being exactly repeated. On the two occasions when I passed the rookery, on the mornings of April 16th and 21st, several visits of the male were observed at approximately quarter hour intervals, and always the two nests were visited in the same order and both females fed.

This association, quite different from those described in letters from B. M. A. Chappell and F. Dean (*antea*, Vol. xxxix, p. 352 and Vol. xl, p. 191) strongly suggests a case of bigamy. It is surprising that the cock should have "remembered" each time to save some food for the second hen.

The same rookery was visited again in 1947, but the tree contained two normal nests and no similar case has been noted in other rookeries.

R. J. LYE.

COURTSHIP FEEDING OF HAWFINCH.

As the courtship feeding of the Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes c. coccothraustes*) appears to be rarely observed it may be of interest

to record that I witnessed this on May 6th, 1946, at Lymppstone, Devon. A sharp "zeek-eek", persistently repeated, drew my attention to a pair of Hawfinches in a wood. While the female uttered the note the male was several yards from her searching among the leaves of an oak-tree. She flew to him and perched, still calling, with her wings held off her body and tail spread. Holding green caterpillars in his beak the male went to her, and she, with beak wide open and still repeating the note, but more quickly, crouched and swayed her body from side to side; the male then put the food in her beak.

R. G. ADAMS.

[Though the male regularly feeds the female on the nest, courtship-feeding away from the nest has very seldom been recorded. It was observed by H. Dathe in Germany (*Beitr. Fortpfl.-biol. Vög.*, 1940, p. 30).—EDS.]

THE RACIAL STATUS OF CONTINENTAL CHAFFINCHES OBTAINED IN LANCASHIRE, WITH SOME FIELD OBSERVATIONS.

IN *British Birds*, Vol. xl, 1947, p. 308, details are given of the first Lancashire record of the Continental race of Chaffinch (*Fringilla c. cœlebs*). Further examples of wintering birds taken in the Burnley district in the winter of 1946-1947 and the late autumn of 1947 have shown that it is of regular occurrence, arriving generally during the period 3rd week October—2nd week November.

These specimens have been critically examined in the light of Dr. J. M. Harrison's recent and valuable contribution on some of the races comprising the western Palearctic *Fringilla cœlebs* group (vide *Ibis*, 1947, pp. 411-418), in which the diagnostic characters of the two major racial divisions of the Continental bird, viz., *Fringilla cœlebs cœlebs* Linnæus, 1758: Sweden, and *Fringilla cœlebs hortensis* Brehm, 1831: Middle Germany, are accurately defined. On the data given by Harrison it is evident that all the Lancashire examples of Continental *F. cœlebs* taken to date are of the race *F. cœlebs hortensis*, distinguishable on account of the vinaceous, in some almost violaceous, tones of the ventral surfaces, which parts in topotypical *F. c. cœlebs* are browner and darker in colour. My identification of some of these birds was kindly confirmed by Dr. P. A. Hens, Netherlands, an acknowledged expert on the species, when he worked over my series in June, 1947.

Additional samples of wintering Chaffinches are now clearly required in order to ascertain the numerical status of the type form which, judging by available information on its distribution as a winter visitor to these islands, must be expected to occur in the same areas as *F. c. hortensis*.

These findings, based as they are on specimens collected in Lancashire, are perhaps true of much of western Great Britain. Certainly, my notes and collections from south-west Scotland

show that *F. c. hortensis* is the dominant Continental race wintering in this region, and the arrival dates correspond remarkably closely to those for Lancashire.

F. c. hortensis is not at present admitted to the British List, all Continental Chaffinches being listed as *F. c. cœlebs*, but in view of Harrison's work (*loc. cit.*) both *F. c. cœlebs* and *F. c. hortensis* must now be recognized as occurring in the British Isles.

The feeding and general habits of the Continental birds on their arrival are distinctive and enable them to be separated in the field from the British race, *F. c. gengleri*. At this season they are very largely arboreal feeders, repairing freely to wooded districts to feed in trees, exhibiting a pronounced predilection for sycamores, oaks, and beeches. They appear to be almost exclusively insectivorous at this period, and their comparative silence is perhaps worthy of mention. Furthermore, these Continental birds generally exude a pungent odour, reminiscent of decaying leaves, which is retained by a skin for several weeks. Species of Paridæ have a closely similar odour in the autumn, which seems to be essentially connected with an arboreal existence at this period of the year.

P. A. CLANCEY.

[At their meeting on January 21st, 1948, the British Ornithologists' Union List Committee agreed to recognize *Fringilla cœlebs hortensis* and to accept this race to the British List.—EDS.]

HOUSE-SPARROW ROBBING MISTLE-THRUSH OF WORM.

WITH reference to the note on Starlings robbing Blackbirds of worms (*antea*, p. 340), a similar observation may be of interest although it concerns different species.

On June 23rd, 1947, a Mistle-Thrush (*Turdus v. viscivorus*) was seen feeding on a miniature golf course at Ramsgate, Kent; it had just pulled out a worm when a House-Sparrow (*Passer d. domesticus*) flew down from a hedge near by, seized the worm in the Mistle-Thrush's bill and after a brief tug-of-war secured and flew off with it. The Mistle-Thrush did not pursue the sparrow.

L. LLOYD-EVANS.

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL BREEDING IN ESSEX.

THE presence of a male, female and several young Blue-headed Wagtails (*Motacilla f. flava*) at a locality in Essex was reported to me by Mr. Reginald W. Arthur, and as I was unable to visit the area he has kindly sent me the following particulars.

They were first seen on June 13th, 1947, at Seawick Estate, St. Osyth, when the young were still being fed by both parents. They were still short-tailed and stumpy-looking, although able to move about. After approximately seven days the birds were not seen again.

The following is a description of the male bird: head slate-blue, darker through eye, with white stripes above and below eye; under-parts bright yellow; upper-parts greenish-brown; wings with yellowish half margins to feathers. The female and young were rather similar to Yellow Wagtails (*M. flava flavissima*).

JOHN N. MEAD.

PIED WAGTAIL FEEDING YOUNG ON FISH.

At Boston Spa, Yorks., on June 23rd, 1946, a pair of Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*) were feeding young in a nest in an ivy-covered wall overlooking the river; on two occasions the female brought a small unidentified fish to the nest. Unfortunately I did not see the fish obtained. KENNETH BROWN.

[*The Handbook* section on the food of this species notes that "stranded trout-fly and fish-bones" have been recorded, but we do not know of any instance of fish captured alive, as these presumably were, being either eaten by the adults or fed to young.—Eds.]

ABSENCE OF FEATHERS IN NEST OF WILLOW-WARBLER.

It may be of interest to record that two nests of the Willow-Warbler (*Phylloscopus t. trochilus*) which I found in Yorkshire in 1945 and 1946 contained no feathers in the lining, which was of fine dry grass. Both nests contained young and the attendant males of both were heard in song. KENNETH BROWN.

[The Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain (*Handbook*, Vol. ii, p. 10) considered that feathers are used "almost invariably".—Eds.]

THE RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL: A NEW BIRD TO THE BRITISH LIST.

THE first number of the new series of *The Scottish Naturalist* (Vol. ix, pp. 6-7), noticed on another page, contains the important announcement of the occurrence in Shetland of a bird new to the British List, the Red-flanked Bluetail (*Tarsiger cyanurus*), also called the Japanese Bush-Robin.

The bird was observed by Mr. Samuel Bruce on October 7th, 1947, near Skaw on Whalsay. Mr. Bruce writes that from its mode of feeding he at first sight took it for a Robin, but "on getting my glass on the bird I was somewhat startled to find that it had a blue rump and that the orange markings were confined solely to its flanks. It was busy catching insects around the pools of water on the barren hills and frequently perched on high tussocks to dart down after them. It was rather shy and kept flitting about quickly from pool to pool around which its food was most plentiful, never rising very high but keeping low to the ground. It carried the wings rather under the tail. I did not hear it make any sound. In order to establish its identity I procured it."

As may be gathered from this account, the Bluetail is allied to the Robin and Redstart. In the adult male the whole upper-parts are more or less blue, but the Shetland specimen (which was not sexed) is a young bird in its first autumn. Its identification as *Tarsiger cyanurus* was confirmed by Mr. N. B. Kinnear at the British Museum, where comparison with a series showed that it belongs to the typical race, *T. c. cyanurus*, whose breeding range, so far as known, extends, according to Buturlin and Dementiev (*Systema Avium Rossicarum*, Vol. 1, p. 255), from near the western slopes of the middle Urals through western and central Siberia to Lake Baikal. There is only a single previous recorded occurrence in western Europe at Pisa, Italy, in November, 1879.

A coloured plate from a kodachrome photograph of the specimen is given.

THE EDITORS.

LATE NIGHTINGALE IN SUSSEX.

ON October 10th, 1947, I heard a Nightingale (*Luscinia m. megarhyncha*) in song near Handcross, Sussex. It sang short phrases almost continuously for about five minutes. When it had stopped singing I had a very brief glimpse of the bird before it disappeared through the undergrowth. The day was warm and sunny.

Except for a record of November 10th, 1836, in Oxfordshire, this would appear to be the latest date for this species in this country.

I. J. FERGUSON LEES.

BEWICK'S SWAN IN SHETLAND IN SEPTEMBER.

ON September 6th, 1947, I saw a solitary Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus b. bewickii*) on Loch of Cliff, Unst, Shetlands. It was repeatedly attacked by Great Skuas (*Stercorarius s. skua*). It was still there on September 8th.

On September 9th I saw what was presumably the same bird on Loch Watlee, a few miles to the south. It was seen on the latter loch by R. Baxter and P. Parry on September 26th, 1947. It would be interesting to know if this bird summered in Shetland, or whether it had just come in. The movement from one loch to the other suggests the latter. Local information supported this view. The bird appeared to be in good health, though the yellow on the bill was not brilliant. *The Handbook* does not mention any occurrences of this bird in September.

NORMAN W. MOORE.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK IN LEICESTERSHIRE.

ON NOVEMBER 30th, 1947, I saw a Ferruginous Duck on the River Soar between Barrow and Loughborough. It was swimming alone amongst reeds near the side of the river. Although I was somewhat concealed by some willows when I first saw the bird it took alarm and flew up; after circling around several times, however, it landed again a short distance further up-stream.

After stalking it to about 30-50 yards, I obtained a tolerably good view with binoculars in a good light for a short time before the bird was unfortunately frightened away by a passing train.

During the period of observation I noted the following points: general build much as a Pochard or Tufted Duck; head and neck brownish-chestnut; back dark brownish; flanks light chestnut; under tail-coverts pure white; bill polished slate colour. The irides gleamed lightish, but I could not determine their exact colour. The belly, as seen in flight, was pure white and the broad white wing-bars very noticeable.

P. H. GAMBLE.

[A field sketch of the bird and of the appearance of the spread wing confirms the identification.—EDS.]

FIRST BREEDING OF GANNETS IN CHANNEL ISLANDS.

FOLLOWING the publication of an article on Alderney in the *Countryman* (autumn 1947), in which mention is made of the new gannetry on Ortac and the Garden Rocks (see *British Birds*, xxxix, 309-312), I received a letter from Major J. A. A. Wallace, M.C., and I am grateful for his permission to quote as follows: "At the time of the military evacuation 1940, I was commanding 341 M.G.T.C., the garrison of Alderney. We evacuated on a Sunday in June at 6 hours' notice—I think it must have been June 23rd. I do know that the previous Wednesday afternoon I and some of my junior officers went to Ortac, as I was anxious to study the Kittiwake colony there. One of my subalterns came to me in great excitement and wanted me to come and see 'a big white bird like an albatross.' I went—it was a Gannet on her nest. It was the only one and all the local people assured me—the first. It was on top of Ortac, where as far as I can remember the going was easy, though the landing had been very difficult. I can't be more precise, but if I could go with you I could show you the exact spot. The sitting Gannet eventually flew off—she had an egg and presumably hatched it out and so started the new colony. In the same season I landed on the Garden Rocks several times, but there were no Gannets there then. From my home address (Stranraer) you will see that I live almost in sight of Ailsa, so there was no mistake."

Major Wallace's evidence proves very clearly that the Gannet (*Sula bassana*) first bred in the Channel Islands in 1940.

R. M. LOCKLEY.

GANNETS BREEDING ON THE SEPT-ILES, BRITTANY.

ON July 23rd, 1939, we visited the bird island of Rouzic, one of the Sept-Iles, off the north coast of Brittany, France. On the crossing from the mainland to the islands we saw about 30-50 Gannets (*Sula bassana*) fishing. Amongst them were a few brown birds of the previous year. On the island itself, on a rocky promontory directed to the south-west, Gannets were also present. There were at most 20 individuals. In a photograph of the top of the rock four adult Gannets can be seen sitting, in addition to many Herring-Gulls (*Larus argentatus*). We have no certain ground for stating that the Gannet at that time was already nesting on Rouzic. According to the watcher, M. Le Penven,

the species had still never bred on the Sept-Iles. Also in a booklet issued in 1930 by the Ligue française pour la Protection des Oiseaux on the bird-life of the Sept-Iles there is no positive indication of breeding.

DIETER BURCKHARDT AND LUKAS HOFFMANN.

The above note was sent to us in the autumn of 1946 through Mr. David Lack, who had met the observers in Switzerland, and it was, we believe, the first intimation to ornithologists that Gannets might be breeding on the Sept-Iles. We immediately communicated with M. Noel Mayaud, the well-known French ornithologist, with a view to securing, if possible, more up-to-date information, and especially to ascertaining whether the birds had since definitely established themselves as breeders. Apparently this important addition to the French list of breeding birds had remained unknown to any of the leading French ornithologists up till that time, but after enquiry M. Mayaud was able to inform us early in 1947 that Gannets had now definitely been breeding on Rouzic for several years. We acceded, however, to his request to defer publication until more exact information had been obtained. Later, at the B.O.U. meeting in Edinburgh in June, 1947, we discussed the matter with MM. Olivier and Etchecopar, who also interested themselves in the matter. On November 11th, 1947, we heard further from M. Mayaud that a M. Berthet had visited Rouzic in June of that year and obtained further data. On June 17th he found about 140 to 160 Gannets present and found 14 nests with eggs or young, as well as about 15 old nests. According to information given by M. Le Penven, the watcher, "Gannets were wintering in good number in 1939-40. During the next spring (1940) several Gannets remained in Rouzic and also during the spring of 1941, but owing to the circumstances no proof of breeding was obtained. It was during the spring of 1942 that the watcher was sure of the nidification, having found eggs and young". It must be admitted that there is a certain ambiguity as to the exact year when breeding began, since Mme. Billot, of "La Ligue Française pour la Protection des Oiseaux" has stated in a letter to M. Olivier, which he has most kindly shown us, that "the watcher reports that the first nests were in 1940, and that they appeared on Rouzic in 1939." It seems evident that the watcher did not keep exact notes and his evidence as to the precise year of first breeding is probably therefore somewhat unreliable, but it seems reasonable to accept provisionally that the first nests actually *seen* were in 1942 and that breeding in the previous years was inferred.

We note that an announcement of the breeding of Gannets on Rouzic appears in the "Bulletin de la Ligue Française pour la Protection des Oiseaux" appended to the current number of *L'Oiseau* (Vol. xvii, No. 2), together with photographs, but no information as to the numbers or history of the colony is given.

THE EDITORS.

[Since the above was in the press Mr. R. M. Lockley has personally visited the Sept-Iles and we are glad to be able to add the result of his investigations on the spot.—EDS.]

On May 17th, 1948, I visited Les Sept-Iles in the company of M. Georges Le Penven, the warden of the islands for the French League for the Protection of Birds. Unfortunately there was too much swell to permit a landing, but I estimated that some 250 Gannets were present on the sloping cliff of the north-east side of Ile Rouzic. Of these about 100 flew off when the boat drew close to the cliffs. From my experience of visiting other gannetries at this time of year, I find that it is usually the "unoccupied" birds (i.e. the non-breeding and/or "off-duty" mates of the brooding birds) which fly away at first, and that the sitting bird invariably remains on the nest until driven away by a much closer approach by the observer. It is possible therefore to form, from a boat at sea, a reasonably accurate estimate of the number of occupied nests in a small cliff gannetry by counting the birds which remain on their nests. In this instance approximately 115 birds were observed to remain on their nests. The qualification "approximately" is necessary because it was not possible to count any individuals which might have been concealed in a fold in the cliffs, and also the swell made it difficult to count with perfect accuracy. But three careful counts during the half-hour we remained under the gannetry gave an average of 115 sitting birds.

This new gannetry is situated on the *north-east* corner of Rouzic, and most of the nests are on an east-facing slope; about 16 nests are on a slope facing north. The colony is divided into three distinct groups on three adjacent projections of the cliff, which rises from a rough rock-strewn base to a grassy pinnacle about one hundred and twenty feet above sea-level. The most easterly section was estimated to hold 19 occupied and several unoccupied nests; the central group 41; and the most northerly group 55 nests; in all at least 115 occupied nests. It was not possible to count accurately what appeared to be unoccupied nests in the "dead" or assembly areas around the colonies.

M. Le Penven kindly showed me his log-book of visits to Rouzic since 1938. In this only one apparently firm count of nesting pairs is given. According to this record, and to supporting statements by M. Le Penven, there were no Gannets in 1938; one pair which "perhaps had an egg" in 1939; "probably six pairs in 1940"; in 1941 "27 Gannets were seen during September"—in this and the years 1942-44, M. Le Penven was only able to make four visits altogether, he informed me, and owing to the restrictions imposed by the German occupation authorities, it was not possible to count the Gannets during the breeding season. In May, 1945, there were, he records, 25 pairs breeding; in 1946 they were recorded as "greatly increased"; and in 1947 they were "doubled on 1946 and breeding in three sites", as in 1948.

From all the foregoing evidence, conflicting as it is, it would appear that the Gannet first settled on Rouzic in 1939, when one pair may have bred. The colony seems to have increased to about 115 pairs in the nine years to 1948. This is a much slower rate of increase than that of the Alderney colony, which reached 450 pairs in the six years 1940-1946.

At Alderney the Gannets are not molested, but it appears that, in spite of the fact that Rouzic is declared a sanctuary under the French League for the Protection of Birds, some depredation may occur as the result of the occasional visits of the numerous fishermen who work that region from several of the neighbouring ports of Brittany—in the temporary absence of the warden of the islands, who lives on the mainland. This may account for the "15 old nests" discovered by Mr. Berthet, and for the unoccupied nests which I saw; it is, I believe, unusual to find empty nests in a new and apparently thriving and expanding gannetry.

R. M. LOCKLEY.

FIRST BREEDING OF FULMAR IN SOUTH WALES.

MR. W. MIALL JONES, of Aberystwyth, informs me that the Fulmar (*Fulmarus g. glacialis*) bred near the Bird Rock, New Quay, Cardiganshire, in 1947. I myself observed three pairs on ledges there in 1945, but there were no signs of eggs or chicks. Mr. Jones first saw them on ledges on June 3rd, and estimated eight birds present at one time. On August 19th he received information from a boatman that there were two young Fulmars on ledges which could be seen from the sea. Mr. Jones writes: "I went to New Quay on the 22nd, but by that date one young Fulmar had flown, but I was able to see the other. I did not see any adult Fulmars on that day, and was informed by the boatman and a Mr. Graham that the adult Fulmars had not been seen for some days."

R. M. LOCKLEY.

LARGE NUMBERS OF BLACK-TAILED GODWITS IN SUSSEX.

IN the autumn of 1947 there was a considerable migration of Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa l. limosa*) through the south-western corner of Sussex, particularly at Thorney Island; though up to fifteen were recorded inland at Chichester gravel-pits on August 21st. Besides ourselves, birds were seen by Messrs. E. A. Blake, G. des Forges, G. M. Moll, C. W. G. Paulson and J. A. Smith.

The following numbers were recorded on the twelve visits paid to Thorney during the autumn:—August 15th, none, August 21st, 500; August 29th, 100; September 1st, 150; September 4th, 3; September 7th, 30; September 14th, 20; September 21st, 2; October 5th, 600; October 12th, 300; October 19th, 1; October 26th, none.

The godwits were generally in one single flock. It will be noted that the two peak dates of August 21st and October 5th-12th were

both preceded and followed by days with few or no birds present. The large flocks did not stay more than a few days. The flocks of 300, 500 and 600, would appear to be the largest numbers recorded in single flocks in Sussex.

I. J. FERGUSON LEES AND J. A. WALPOLE-BOND

LITTLE STINT WINTERING IN DEVON.

ON December 7th, 1947, I saw a Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) on the Exe estuary. The bird was with a flock of Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*), among which its small size was very noticeable on the ground and in flight. Its grey upper plumage was very like that of its companions, except that it was decidedly more boldly marked, the dark centres of the feathers contrasting with the pale edges. The comparatively short and straight beak was observed, and the soft "teet-teet-teet" call-note heard once as the flock took flight, returning to the same spot again.

On January 4th, 1948, the bird was seen again at the same spot by my friends, Major J. K. Windeatt, Mr. F. R. Smith and his daughter and myself.

R. G. ADAMS.

AMERICAN PECTORAL SANDPIPER IN SOMERSET.

ON September 6th, 1947, while walking across part of Porlock Marsh, Somerset, I noticed an unfamiliar wader consorting with a Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*). The light was poor, but I was able to note the most striking characteristics, and on reference to *The Handbook* I suspected that it might be an American Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*). On September 7th, assisted by A. V. Cornish and E. W. Hendy, I was able to confirm this after three hours' observation at ranges down to 12 feet.

The following description was noted:—Bill appeared black, but possibly mud-encrusted, slightly lighter at base, slightly decurved; crown brown-black, slightly striated, bordered on each side by buffish-white stripe; back showed pronounced stripy effect when bird bent down while facing observer, stripes being caused chiefly by two fine whitish lines along each side, general colour sepia; the closed wing showed outer primaries nearly black and inner ones with a rufous tinge; wing (spread on ground): secondaries dark brown, fine whitish line bisecting wing laterally; tail (seen on ground) with dark centre feathers bordered by lighter greyish feathers; chin white; breast buff, evenly streaked with grey or grey-brown ending abruptly; under-parts and under tail-coverts white, under-wing (in flight) white or grey-white; legs yellow or greenish-yellow. The bird was longer in the leg than the Dunlin but otherwise only very slightly larger.

The flight was snipe-like, but not so erratic; the bird never "towered" and settled again rapidly, probably because of its general tameness. It had two quite distinct stances; one was a hunched position in which it could easily be passed over for a

Dunlin in a cursory inspection, the other, which it assumed several times while under observation, was quite different. The neck was raised and extended and the legs straightened; the bird then looked, in shape, like a miniature Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) in winter plumage.

The bird was solitary, not associating, except by accident, with other waders; it was less active than most Dunlins, sometimes standing for a minute or two motionless.

On at least two occasions, when it rose without being flushed, no note was heard. The note on rising was a hoarse, sibilant "tweet-tweet" once or more repeated; a faint squawk was heard once when the bird was on the ground.

I saw it again on September 8th and 9th (when it was also seen by A. V. Cornish and H. J. Craske), and on a dozen or more occasions during the succeeding month. It was last seen (by E. W. Hendy) on October 14th, 1947. I might add that the marsh throughout the period was extremely dry and the bird frequented a mud flat left by the retreating water. J. A. NELDER.

GREATER YELLOWSHANK IN IRELAND.

At the beginning of March, 1947, I saw in a Dublin poultry exporter's store, a wader which was unfamiliar to me. As it was not considered of any edible value, it was given to me and I took it to the National Museum, Dublin, where it was recognized as a Greater Yellowshank (*Tringa melanoleuca*). The skin has been preserved and is in the National Collection. Unfortunately, no details of its origin could be traced beyond the fact that it undoubtedly was shot in Ireland. The firm concerned receives wildfowl from all over the country and once the bird had been separated from the consignment with which it arrived there was no possibility of tracing it further. F. W. Fox.

[Mr. E. O'Mahony, of the National Museum of Ireland, has kindly sent us the measurements of the bird, which are as follows: wing 195 mm., bill from feathers 56 mm., tarsus 64 mm., tail 72 mm.—Eds.]

AVOCET IN NORTH DEVON.

On November 5th, 1947, I saw an Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) on Northam Burrows, N. Devon, off the sea marsh at the northern end. It was feeding at the edge of the water and was very shy, continually straightening up and looking around at every cry from its neighbours, Curlew (*Numenius a. arquata*) and Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa l. lapponica*). It frequently flew short distances and I heard it call on one occasion when a Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) flew over its head. It was apparently an immature bird, as the top of the head and down the nape, back and wings were dark brownish black and the white on the wing coverts was indistinct and flecked with blackish-brown. The bill

was dark brownish-black to black from the turn; the legs appeared dark grey.

It was searched for on subsequent days, but was not seen again.

GEOFFREY H. GUSH.

[Though Avocets are not excessively rare on the Exe estuary there appears to have been no record for North Devon for many years.—EDS.]

“INJURY-FEIGNING” OF OYSTER-CATCHER.

IN connexion with E. L. Roberts' note on the “injury-feigning” of an Oyster-catcher (*Hæmatopus ostralegus occidentalis*) (*antea*, Vol. xl, p. 284), and especially as there appear to have been only two other records in the British Isles, the following may be of interest:—

In the first week of June, 1947, Mrs. F. E. Carter and I were bird-watching in the Orkney Islands, and saw an Oyster-catcher standing on the grass a few yards from the shingle. As we approached the bird, which had a dejected and dishevelled appearance, it ran very stiffly away with lowered head and drooping wings. One wing hung very low, the feathers apparently quite disordered and so battered-looking that we both believed the injury to be genuine. The bird hobbled to and fro as though seeking an exit from the field, and finding one, half fluttered, half ran into the next enclosure, appearing almost to fall in doing so. We followed, and not until a minute or two later did we recognize the performance to be “injury-feigning”. At length the bird sprang into the air and flew back over our heads with sharp “cleep, cleep” alarm cries.

Two days later, on another island, we noticed two other Oyster-catchers which had probably left their nests in the shingle (we found a nest with eggs chipping) running along the shore in a poor attempt at “injury-feigning”, more as described by E. L. Roberts, but with lowered heads and drooping wings.

S. V. BENSON.

LATE SANDWICH TERN IN DEVON.

ON October 26th, 1947, I saw a Sandwich Tern (*Sterna s. sandvicensis*) on the Exe estuary, the same individual, no doubt, being seen again on November 1st, 8th and 16th. It was an immature bird with beak that looked entirely black, the forehead being white, nape thickly streaked with black, upper plumage thickly speckled with brown, and primaries grey. On the first three occasions it was observed diving in characteristic fashion, and on the last date it was seen to alight on a sand-bank and there watched preening.

R. G. ADAMS.

COMMON AND HERRING-GULLS PERCHING IN TREES.

WITH reference to Mr. Barnes's record of a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) perching in a tree (*antea*, p. 126) it may be

worth recording that in December, 1940, I found that Common Gulls (*L. canus*) habitually perched, ten or more together, on trees by a lake in Birkenhead Park, Cheshire, in company with Black-headed Gulls (*L. ridibundus*) and a few Herring-Gulls (*L. argentatus*).

A. W. BOYD.

FOOD OF HAWFINCH AND BULLFINCH.—Mr. H. G. Attlee draws our attention to the seeds of the Wych-Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) as a frequent item in the spring food of the Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) not mentioned in *The Handbook*, and also notes that he has frequently observed Bullfinches (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) in late autumn and winter feeding on the seeds or "keys" of the Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), often at some height in the branches.