

## DELAYED EMIGRATION OF CERTAIN BIRDS IN AUTUMN 1954

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### PART I—SUMMER-VISITORS

SEVERAL notes received by the Editors of *British Birds* in the winter of 1954-55 confirmed the impression of some individual observers that the departure of migratory birds, both summer-visitors and passage-migrants, had been unusually delayed in the autumn of 1954. Appeals for information on this subject in *British Birds*, *The Field* and *Country Life* brought only a moderate response, but a number of County Recorders kindly sent details of late occurrences in advance of publication and further data have been obtained from County and other local reports. The writer is greatly indebted to Mr. I. J. Ferguson-Lees for his help and advice in the preparation of this paper.

A study of the collected notes shows that the delay in departure did not affect all species, but for several there was an exceptional number of late records. Birds which do not breed in southern Britain will be treated separately in the second part of this report, but of the breeding species the Yellow Wagtail provided the most striking example of delayed emigration: there were not less than thirty occurrences, some of considerable numbers, within the range of late dates given in *The Handbook of British Birds* (H. F. Witherby *et al.* 1938-41), though it should be added that there have been rather more October records of this species in several recent years than there were before 1940. Six or more "late dates" were added to those given in *The Handbook* for Sand Martin, Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler, and there were several also for Common or Arctic Tern, Whinchat, Chiffchaff and Pied Flycatcher, while Swifts, Swallows and House Martins were seen later than usual in many districts. An analysis of the late dates given for summer-resident species in *The Handbook* for the years 1900 to 1937, inclusive, shows that a total of 13 was recorded in 1911, 12 in 1912, 11 in 1910, 10 in 1935, and from 0 to 9 in the other years. Even when allowance is made for the better cover of the country by bird-watchers and local reports in recent years it is clear that the number of delayed departures in 1954 was exceptional, and indeed probably unique in this century.

A short account of the weather conditions in the last four months of 1954, taken from the *Monthly Reports of the Meteorological Office*, will be given at the end of the second part of this paper. In brief, after a cool, wet, unsettled summer, the autumn of 1954 was generally mild, wet and stormy, with

no prolonged period of anticyclonic conditions. It may be suggested that two factors were concerned in the large number of late occurrences of certain species: a hold-up of departures owing to the lack of favourable weather for migration, and a high rate of survival of lingering birds because of the absence of early frosts and consequent abundance, for the time of year, of insect food.

In the following summary of the more significant records for each species the normal time of departure is quoted from *The Handbook*, and details are given of any occurrences falling within the range of late dates given in that work.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Tringa hypoleucos*).—"Single birds fairly often recorded in winter in various parts of England, Wales and Ireland. Emigration . . . to end September with stragglers to second week October." Late migrants or wintering birds were recorded as follows: One at Mucking, Essex, 7th November; one at Teesmouth, Durham, 24th and 31st October, 14th November; two on River Medina, Isle of Wight, 5th December; one at Egypt Bay and one at King's Ferry, Kent, in December; one at Chew Valley Reservoir, Somerset, 28th December; one on Taf Estuary, Carmarthenshire, 1st January 1955; singles wintered on Rivers Exe, Clyst, Tamar and Torridge in Devonshire.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) and ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna macrura*). Owing to the difficulty of identification of these species, especially in autumn, they are taken together. When the species has been stated this is given in brackets, but the writer of this paper has not seen evidence of identification in any case. It should be noted that a late date for a Common Tern ("passage south . . . to mid-October") is not necessarily one for an Arctic ("passage south . . . to second week October, with frequent stragglers to end of month"). Terns recorded as Common were seen in Lancashire on 16th October and in the Isle of Wight on the 17th.

- 23rd October: One on The Wash, Lincolnshire.
- 24th October: One on Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset.
- 27th October: One at Spurn Head, Yorkshire.
- 31st October: One (Arctic) at Hilbre Island, Cheshire.
- 7th November: One (Common) on River Yealm, Devon.
- 13th November: An immature off Joppa, near Edinburgh.
- 21st November: One at Bliethfield Reservoir, Staffordshire.
- 5th December: One near Bridlington, Yorkshire.
- 19th to 21st December: One over Ramsgate Harbour, Kent.

LITTLE TERN (*Sterna albifrons*).—"Passage south . . . to end September with stragglers to first week October."

- 30th October: 3 seen at close range at Belvide, Staffordshire.

SANDWICH TERN (*Sterna sandvicensis*).—“Southward passage . . . to second week October.”

23rd October: One or two in Welland Estuary, Lincolnshire.

TURTLE DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*). — “Summer residents . . . leave early August to first week October.”

21st October: One at Layer Breton, Essex.

5th November: 6 at New Mill End, Hertford-Bedfordshire border.

CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*). — “Adults . . . up to last week August. Juveniles leave during August and first half September.”

2nd October: One at Kirby-le-Soken, Essex.

NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).—“Emigration . . . lasts to third or fourth week September.” Single birds were recorded in Norfolk and Sussex on 26th and 28th September respectively, and one was identified “with little doubt” on Lundy on 22nd October.

SWIFT (*Apus apus*). — “Movement continues to end August, with frequent stragglers first half September and occasional ones to first week October.” There were 8 records for the last week of September, including one in Northumberland on the 26th, and 5 for the first week of October.

16th October: One at Leicester.

19th October: One at Spurn Head, Yorkshire.

SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*).—“Passage and emigration continue to nearly end October. Stragglers frequent in November up to end third week. Very numerous isolated records after third week November, may relate to wintering birds.” There were November occurrences in many parts of England and Wales, and the following single birds were recorded in December: On 1st and 3rd at Redcar, Yorkshire; on 4th at Skirlaugh, Yorkshire; on 5th at East Tilbury, Essex; on 8th at Lytham, Lancashire; on 31st near Berwick-on-Tweed.

HOUSE MARTIN (*Delichon urbica*).—“Emigration . . . lasts to third week October, stragglers frequent to mid-November and occasional to first week December.” There were 19 November records, mostly single birds in the South and Midlands, but including one near Edinburgh on the 7th and 5 at Tenby, Pembrokeshire, on the 13th. Two were seen at Langley Point, Sussex, on 4th December, and two near Bridlington, Yorkshire, on the 5th.

[16th January 1955: Two almost certainly indentified off Sandbanks, Dorset.]

SAND MARTIN (*Riparia riparia*).—“Emigration . . . to end third week September. Stragglers frequent to mid-October.” There

were 6 records for the first half of October, including one in North Westmorland on the 13th.

16th October: 700 at Kingsdown, Kent, and 9 at Spurn Head, Yorkshire.

19th October: Last seen on Lundy, Devon.

20th October: One at Little Eaton, Derbyshire.

22nd October: 7 over Hove, Sussex.

26th October: One at Leewick, Essex.

30th October: 5 flying W.S.W. over Dungeness, Kent.

25th November: Two over Mansfield Camp, Uckfield, Sussex.

RING OUZEL (*Turdus torquatus*).—"Departure movements . . . continue to first week November. Records between mid-November and mid-February may relate to wintering birds." Single birds were seen in Sussex and Essex on 6th and 14th November respectively. One at Sevenoaks, Kent, on 6th December and one at Cliffe, Kent, on the 7th. An adult cock was seen on Staines Moor and near George VI Reservoir, Middlesex, from January to April 1955.

WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*).—"Movement . . . up to third week October. Stragglers continue to pass in most years up to mid-November." There were four records for the first week of November.

19th November: One at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire.

WHINCHAT (*Saxicola rubetra*).—"Emigration . . . to fourth week September. Stragglers in most years to second week October."

16th October: One at Seaford, Sussex.

20th November: A female at St. Leonards, Sussex.

21st November: One at Bulverhithe, Sussex.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER (*Locustella naevia*).—"Departure . . . lasts to end of September."

2nd October: One near Walmer Castle, Kent.

REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*).—"Departure . . . lasts to end September." A juvenile was still being fed by parents at Cley, Norfolk, in "early October."

2nd October: One on Cambridge Sewage Farm.

9th October: One on Lundy, Devon.

11th October: One on the Crumbles, Sussex.

13th October: One roosting in hedge at St. Osyth, Essex.

SEDGE WARBLER (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*).—"Departure . . . . to end September."

2nd October: One on Farlington Marshes, Hampshire; one

at Chart Sutton, Kent; one at Chesterton Fen, Cambridgeshire.

6th October: Two on Pett Level, Sussex.

9th October: One at Rodbourne Sewage Farm, near Swindon, Wiltshire.

There were up to three on the Crumbles, Sussex, during the first week of October, two on the 11th and 12th, one on the 14th.

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*).—"Southward movement . . . to first few days October. Occasional later stragglers October 9th—26th."

6th November: One caught at Spurn Head, Yorkshire.

WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*).—"Southward movement . . . lasts till mid-October. Stragglers recorded several times in November up to the 10th."

9th November: One at Hadleigh, Essex.

LESSER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia curruca*).—"Southward movement . . . to first week October., stragglers frequent to mid-October."

12th—19th November: One seen on five of these days on Lundy, Devon.

24th November—10th December: One at North Fambridge, Essex. *The Handbook* gives only one later date.

WILLOW WARBLER (*Phylloscopus trochilus*).—"Very occasionally recorded in winter in England and Wales. Stragglers fairly frequent up to October 22nd."

25th October: One at Kirby-le-Soken, Essex.

15th December: One seen and heard at Scotton, near Knaresborough, Yorkshire.

CHIFFCHAFF (*Phylloscopus collybita*).—"Most years a few winter. Departure . . . to mid-October." The following November records may be taken as late migrants rather than wintering birds: singles at Spurn, Yorkshire, on 1st, 7th and 13th, and at High Royd Sewage Farm, Yorkshire, on the 7th; odd birds in coastal areas of Sussex until the 14th; one at Horton, Buckinghamshire, on the 13th; one or two on Lundy, Devon, from the 10th to the 17th. On 11th December one was trapped at Dungeness, Kent, and one seen at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire. On 15th December one at South Norwood, Surrey; on the 26th one at Littlebourne, Kent. On 2nd January one at West Hyde, Hertfordshire, and one at Haverfield, Middlesex. One at Beddington, Surrey, 25th January to 12th February, and one at Lonsdale Road Reservoir, Surrey, from the end of January to mid-February.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*).—"Departure of

summer-residents . . . lasts to about mid-September. Passage migration to first few days October." There were six records in the first week of October: One at Shanklin, Isle of Wight, on the 2nd; one at Margareting, Essex, on the 3rd; one at Rugeley, Staffordshire, on the 4th; one each at Lowestoft, Suffolk, and Blakeney, Norfolk, on the 5th, and two on Lundy, Devon, on the 7th.

*PIED FLYCATCHER (Muscicapa hypoleuca).* — "Departure of summer-residents to end August. Passage-migration . . . to end September."

3rd October: One at the Naze, Essex; 3 to 7 at Blakeney Point, Norfolk; 4 at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire.

Up to 8th October: "Seen frequently" on Lundy, Devon.

9th October: One at St. Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight.

*YELLOW WAGTAIL (Motacilla flava).* — "Departs mid-August to end of September." There were numerous records for October and one for November, as follows:

2nd October: One at Slough, Buckinghamshire; one at Checkley, Warwickshire.

3rd October: One at Osborne, Isle of Wight; one at Eye Brook Reservoir, Leicestershire.

4th October: One at Hockley Heath, Warwickshire; one each at Abberton Reservoir and Bishops Stortford Sewage Farm, Essex; one at Cley, Norfolk.

6th October: One at Wallingford Sewage Farm, Berkshire.

8th October: One at Abberton Reservoir, Essex.

9th October: 55 on Cowbit Marshes, Lincolnshire.

10th October: One on Walland Marsh, Kent; one at Sonning Eye, Oxfordshire.

12th October: One near Cambridge.

13th October: One at Snitterfield, Warwickshire.

15th October: One at Hove, Sussex; two at Ardleigh, near Colchester, Essex; one at St. Neots, Huntingdonshire.

17th October: 15 at Bere Ferrers, Devon; one at Newhaven and one on Seven Sisters, Sussex.

18th October: One at Reading, Berkshire.

21st October: Two near Rye, Sussex.

23rd October: One at Barrow Gurney Reservoirs, Somerset.

24th October: 3 at Fosdyke, Lincolnshire.

26th October: One at Perry Oaks Sewage Farm, Middlesex.

29th October: One at Coventry, Warwickshire.

30th October: One on Lundy, Devon; one at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire; one at Minworth, Warwickshire; one at Romford Sewage Farm, Essex.

4th November: Two at Guarlford Sewage Farm, Malvern, Worcestershire.

(To be concluded)