

NOTES

Glossy Ibis in Dorset.—On 3rd December 1956, an adult male Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) was shot in the water meadows of the River Frome at Stratton, near Dorchester, Dorset, by C. J. R. Pope. The bird was examined in the flesh by R. F. Dalton at the County Museum, Dorchester, but finally presented to Charterhouse School Museum, where the skin has been set up. Full details of the plumage and measurements have been supplied by J. J. Swift, who has examined the specimen critically, and these have been submitted to the Editors of *British Birds*.

Mr. Pope has confirmed that as far as he can remember the date of the occurrence was 3rd December, and not 6th December as stated in his letter published in *Country Life* of 7th March 1957. In fairness to Mr. Pope, who has given me permission to quote his name in this note, it should be said that he shot the bird in mistake for a Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and it was with much regret that he realised his error.

The last previously recorded occurrence of this species in Dorset was of four shot in Poole Harbour in 1877. ARTHUR BULL

continued ...

Pratincole in Hampshire.—On 14th September 1957, at Stanpit Marsh, Christchurch Harbour, Hampshire, we observed a Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*). We first saw it, with the sun behind us, at about twenty yards' range, when it was some fifteen feet above the ground. The bird flew in a 400-yard arc across the Marsh, before speeding low, south-west, across the Harbour. Shortly afterwards it appeared again and was watched fluttering up several times before finally settling on the water, where it was visible only as an elongated dark shape. From here it left to the north-west, up the Harbour.

The following points were noted: primaries and deeply-forked tail black, base of tail conspicuously though not extensively white, narrow white diagonal line from base of wing to carpal joint along edge of coverts, rest of upper-parts uniformly very dark brown; under-wing smoky with noticeably russet "lining" (i.e. axillaries and under-wing coverts), body beneath buff-white, darker in the upper breast and facial regions; shape and flight recalling Hirundines (an impression heightened by head-shape and short bill) and terns, although very broad base to rapidly-narrowing wing gave quite different proportions; fast, twisting flight with rapid, shallow wing-beats comparable only to that of a bat; size a little greater than Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*), this species being present.

Although the bird was generally moving away from us and our gaze was directed mainly at the critical colour of the under-wing, we feel that, had a clear-cut throat shield been present, this would have been noticed. The bird was probably an immature changing into adult plumage. J. K. BOWERS and E. L. JONES

Black-winged Pratincole in Somerset.—On 15th June 1957, at Steart, Bridgwater Bay, Somerset, I was searching for young Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) when I glanced up at the adult, and was surprised to see near it an entirely unfamiliar bird which at first sight I took to be a very small species of skua that was unknown to me. Through binoculars I saw a forked tail with white base, dark uniform olive-brown upper-parts and light, rather creamy, under-parts. The under-surfaces of the wings appeared uniformly dark, but I could not make certain of this as the bird flew away into the sun, in a leisurely rather tern-like fashion. In size it had appeared slightly smaller than the Lapwing, but more streamlined.

About two hours later, while driving through the common that runs to the shore at Steart, I spotted the bird again and obtained good views, with the sun behind me, as it stood on the grass about thirty yards from the car. The bird was clearly a pratincole (*Glareola* sp.)—the sandy brown head, distinctly lighter than the back (which was a dark olive-brown), the creamy black-bordered throat-patch, buffish under-parts and white belly could all be clearly seen. The legs were short, and the short slightly decurved bill had a red base. After ten minutes it started flying—apparently

hawking for insects—and on several occasions I had good views of the under-surfaces of the wings which were entirely black with no trace of rufous. Several times it flew near flying Redshanks (*Tringa totanus*) and it appeared to be approximately the same size. It eventually flew right away in the general direction of Burnham. I concluded that the bird could only be a Black-winged Pratincole (*G. nordmanni*).

JOHN REYNOLDS

Pratincole or Black-winged Pratincole in Sussex.—On 21st August 1955, a pratincole (*Glareola* sp.) was seen at the Midrips, near Camber, Sussex, by K. Linford, W. S. Nevin, B. P. Pickess, H. J. C. Seymour and the writer. The bird was first noticed flying overhead at a height of 40-50 feet, calling in a rather harsh, urgent manner. It appeared as a grey-brown plover with a long tapering body. Although the tail could be seen to be forked it did not open widely until the bird turned in flight. The chin, belly and under tail-coverts appeared to be pale, but the under wing-coverts seemed to be black with the remainder of the underwing dark grey. Noticeable flight features were the short neck, small bill and long, pointed wings. Some of the observers likened the bird to a huge Hirundine. As it flew overhead it gave us good views in excellent light, but it did not stop and could not afterwards be located.

The observers all considered the bird to be a Black-winged Pratincole (*G. nordmanni*), but it is appreciated that on such a view it is not always easy to differentiate between this and the Pratincole (*G. pratincola*).

J. W. DONOVAN

[We regret the delay in the publication of this note which originally prompted the preparation of P. J. Hayman's short paper entitled "A note on field-identification of pratincoles" which appeared in 1956 (*antea*, vol. xlix, pp. 312-313, plate 44), and readers are asked to turn to that to see why we do not consider that this record can be assigned with certainty to either bird. The observers say that the under wing-coverts "seemed to be black", but in flight overhead the undersides of the wings of *G. pratincola* look extremely dark, much more so than one might expect; and other points in the description fail to suggest the contrasting black-and-white appearance of *G. nordmanni*. The record of a Black-winged Pratincole in Somerset, however, which appears above, is entirely consistent with typical *nordmanni*. It should be added that intermediates do occur (see R. Meinertzhagen's *Birds of Arabia*, p. 474) and, in fact, the Taxonomic Sub-Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union now recommends (*Ibis*, vol. 98, p. 161) that "*G. nordmanni* be treated as a colour phase of *G. pratincola*, being more or less dominant in south-east Europe and south-west Asia. *G. nordmanni* has been found breeding in Iraq alongside *G. pratincola*, from which it differs nowise in either habit or migration".—EDS.]

Great Skua harrying Shelduck.—At 11.40 a.m. on 28th September 1957, in the estuary of the River Parrett, off Steart Point, Somerset, I had a Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*) under observation. The bird was recognized by its large size—almost as big as a Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)—general dark brown plumage, white patch on wings at base of primaries, heavy thickset body and neck, and short tail. When first seen, it was chasing a party of Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) over the water. These joined other Shelduck resting on the surface, at which the skua then flew towards one of the duck and dropped bodily on to it. The Shelduck immediately dived in a shower of spray and the skua alighted on the spot, keeping its wings half-extended for a few seconds before closing them. After remaining on the water for a short time, the skua then rose and flew towards the nearest Shelduck to repeat the process. In all, in about five minutes, this was done approximately ten times, in each case the duck promptly diving before actually being struck. After the last occasion the skua sat on the water and was watched for a further fifteen minutes as it drifted out with the tide and the river, beyond the end of Steart Point.

R. ANGLES

Black Terns feeding on mud-worms.—On 26th September 1957, and again on the 28th, at the estuary of the River Parrett, Somerset, Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) were taking worms about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long from the surfaces of mud-banks. There were 68 Black Terns present on the 26th (when I watched for two and a half hours) and 6 on the 28th: on each day most of them were actively engaged in feeding in this way. The method of flight was like the normal skimming action over water, the birds hovering above the mud and snatching up the worms without alighting. Sometimes a worm was dropped, but usually they were swallowed immediately. It should be added that the mud was very soft, having been covered during the morning by high spring tides, so much so that the various waders present were wading deep in it.

TREVOR SILCOCKS

Apparent coition between House Martin and Sand Martin.—On 13th May 1955, at Chew Valley reservoir, Somerset, I had a party of approximately thirty Sand Martins (*Riparia riparia*) under observation for well over an hour. For the whole of this time, whether they were in flight or resting on the ground, they were accompanied by a single House Martin (*Delichon urbica*). Other House Martins were flying up and down some distance away, but on no occasion was this bird seen to join them. After I had been watching for some little while, it became apparent that the House Martin was attempting coition with some of the Sand Martins feeding on the ground. When in flight it was trying to settle on their backs, or, if it was itself on the ground, it was making sudden lunges on birds near-by and then attempting to mount.

Then once, after hovering just above a resting Sand Martin, it succeeded in settling on this bird's back. Immediately the Sand Martin began quivering its wings and at the same time turned its head sideways and upwards during the few seconds when coition seemed to take place, while the House Martin retained its balance by a considerable amount of wing-flapping. Unfortunately, soon after this highly interesting performance, the whole flock flew off.

BERNARD KING

Hoarding of food by Willow Tit.—On 14th February 1957, a Willow Tit (*Parus atricapillus*) arrived at a feeding bowl which is set up about 10 feet from our house at West Wickham, Kent. It was one of a pair which frequented a strip of woodland at the rear of the house. The feeding bowl is filled every morning with shelled peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) split into halves. That day I was surprised to see that after taking a peanut the Willow Tit was returning within a few seconds for another. Instead of eating them, it was hiding them in various parts of the garden and also of the neighbouring garden. All were hidden within 20 yards of the feeder and no attempt was made to eat any until the bowl was empty. Then the tit started to search out and feed on the hidden nuts.

This became a daily occurrence in the six weeks that followed. Out of approximately 40-50 half-peanuts placed in the bowl each day, I estimated that some 15-20 were being removed and hidden by the Willow Tit. The other tits—Great Tit (*P. major*) and Blue Tit (*P. caeruleus*), of which there were about 10 altogether—seldom used to obtain more than two half-peanuts each—House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) accounting for the remainder. On two occasions, however, a Blue Tit was seen to remove peanuts hidden by the Willow Tit, while the latter was still emptying the feeding bowl.

The most common hiding-place was in the wire twists securing the chestnut palings of the garden fence, but other places were in crevices in the trunk of an oak tree and in the joints of some rustic trelliswork. The bird always seemed to experience some difficulty in locating the hidden peanuts, the paling fence being searched systematically each time it set out to recover them. On one occasion I found a peanut still wedged in the fence after the bird had left the garden and returned to the woodland.

During the last few days of March, just before the bird ceased to visit the feeding bowl, the habit of hiding food appeared to lessen, until finally the tit was feeding normally from the bowl. It was also about this time that I came to the conclusion that two different Willow Tits were now taking food from the feeder, as at a range of 10 feet slight differences in plumage could be seen. This second bird was never seen to hide food. DAVID HART

Hoarding of food by Coal Tit.—In the early part of October 1957, a Coal Tit (*Parus ater*) occasionally visited the feeding bowl

in our garden at West Wickham, Kent, to eat peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) (shelled and split into halves). Then on 22nd October it started to remove the peanuts and that day it hid 15 of them as follows:

- 1 in a clump of pinks
- 1 in a grass tuft
- 4 in various trees
- 5 in the soil
- 4 at ground level but precise place not seen

I inspected the ground in which one had been concealed, expecting to find the peanut under a stone or lump of soil, but the earth was level and free of stones. A close examination of the top surface failed to reveal the peanut, and I eventually found it by scraping away about one-eighth of an inch of earth. The peanut had been pushed into the fairly loose soil with the bill. When the feeder was empty the bird started to search for the peanut which I had disturbed, but gave up and found one which it had hidden in a tuft of grass. Unfortunately I had to cease watching at this point.

The following day it continued to hoard food, one peanut being inserted between the incurving petals of a chrysanthemum flower (which was in full bloom) and "hammered" into position with the bill. This peanut and one which had been hidden in the soil were found to be missing the morning after that.

On 5th November I refilled the feeding bowl as it became empty and a total of 64 peanuts were hidden in about half an hour, all within 30-40 yards of the feeder.

After this, hoarding of food continued almost daily. On 19th January 1958, the Coal Tit spent 2 hours 55 minutes (with three rests of between 5 and 15 minutes) taking 109 peanuts from the feeder. Of these, 7 were eaten straight away and 102 were hidden, 10 of the latter being partly eaten. These 102 were concealed as follows:

- 9 in brussel tops
- 1 in grass tuft
- 4 in plants
- 1 in the soil
- 87 in hawthorn hedges or trees

The bird then appeared to leave the area for that day and was not seen during the two hours remaining before nightfall.

Occasionally, when the Coal Tit tried to hide food at ground level, the House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) followed it around until the bird was forced to take to the trees. Blue Tits (*P. caeruleus*), Great Tits (*P. major*) and a Willow Tit (*P. atricapillus*) were also seen to follow the Coal Tit when it was looking for a hiding-place. A Great Tit and a Blue Tit were both seen to find peanuts hidden by the Coal Tit.

DAVID HART

Abnormal Dipper breeding in North Wales.—A pair of Dippers (*Cinclus cinclus*) nesting in the wooded valley of a Flintshire stream in 1957 consisted of a normal "chestnut belly" female and an abnormal "black belly" male. The black-brown and slaty plumage on the heads, backs and under-parts of these two birds was similar, thus ruling out the possibility of the male's being a wandering *C. c. hibernicus* from Ireland or the Isle of Man, but his chestnut belly was reduced to a narrow, irregular, broken belt which we found extremely difficult to see even under quite favourable conditions. With a frontal view, only slightly above horizontal, A. W. Boyd and W. Mulligan were unable to see it at all when they visited the nesting waterfall on 13th May.

We examined skins at the British Museum in November. Judging only from memory of our male, the degenerate chestnut belt below his white breast roughly resembled two winter males of *C. c. cinclus* from Scandinavia (Nos. 98.10.2.270 and 98.10.2.273) and an undated female from Ayr, Scotland, labelled *C. c. britannicus* (No. 1925.5.14.16).

Only about one mile of the stream concerned is accessible to us and this we have visited only irregularly, but as far back as 1953-54 a "black belly" and a "chestnut belly" wintered there together. Neither was in first-winter plumage, so it seems possible that our "black belly" male is a resident and at least six years old (unless, of course, he passes on the abnormality to his progeny).

We publish this note to point out the care needed in identifying a genuine Black-bellied Dipper (*C. c. cinclus*). It is possible that further observations may show that this variant occurs elsewhere.

L. S. V. and U. M. VENABLES

Reed Warbler in Co. Down.—On 21st June 1956, we heard a Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) singing in the reed beds of Ballyherly Lough, near Portaferry, Co. Down. C. D. Deane (*Birds of Northern Ireland*, 1954) gives only two reliable records of this species: one killed at Maidens Lighthouse off Co. Antrim on 26th May 1944 and a nest with eggs at Monlough, Co. Down, on 25th May 1935.

L. S. V. and U. M. VENABLES

[This and the following note together possibly suggest a slight tendency to an increase in range.—EDS.]

Reed Warblers in Anglesey.—Vol. II (1938) of *The Handbook* does not include Anglesey in the range of Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), but during recent years several have been heard singing there.

On 12th July 1950 W.M. heard one in shore-marsh reed-beds on the north side of Trearddwr Bay and on 19th May 1957 L.S.V.V. heard two (possibly three) in the north-east reed-beds of Llyn Maelog, Rhosneigr. In this latter locality, too, Peter Wolstenholme heard one singing regularly during his visit from 5th to 10th June 1953.

W. MULLIGAN and L. S. V. VENABLES

[In his "List of birds seen in Anglesey and Caernarvonshire" (*North Western Naturalist*, new series, vol. 2, pp. 604-618), which covers observations during the eight years up to 1954, P. E. S. Whalley says of the Reed Warbler: "Rare on passage in Anglesey, breeding is not proven. One bird seen in May at Malldraeth in 1951, but subsequent searching failed to find even the bird which must be regarded as a passage-migrant".—Eds.]

Greenish Warbler in Kent.—On 17th September 1957, a first-winter Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*) was trapped at Dungeness Bird Observatory, Kent, by Mr. and Mrs. N. Westwood, and brought to me. As they persuaded the bird across brambles into one of the Heligoland traps in the Moat, they were impressed by the paleness of the under-parts, contrasting with olive-green upper-parts, and by a long, whitish eye-stripe; a short bar on the closed wing was seen through binoculars as the bird paused momentarily. In shape, there was no perceptible difference from a Chiffchaff (*Ph. collybita*). No note was heard. A contrastingly lighter and brighter lower mandible was noticed when the warbler was in the catching-box.

In the hand, a detailed examination was made and the bird was weighed and measured. The full description has been sent to the Editors of *British Birds* with this note and it seems necessary to give here only the most significant features. The upper-parts were olive-green, brighter than those of a freshly-moulted Willow Warbler (*Ph. trochilus*). The short wing-bar was formed by yellowish-white tips to the outer webs of the first five greater coverts, the largest (central) tip being just over 2 mm. deep. There was no suggestion of any pale tips to the median coverts, and it should be added here that I could find no trace of abrasion on any of the wing or tail feathers (see discussion in next paragraph). The generally very pale under-parts and the long stripe (actually yellowish-white) from the base of the upper mandible above and well beyond the eye have already been mentioned. The wing (flat) measured 58.5 mm.; the 1st primary was 6 mm. longer than the primary coverts; the 4th primary was longest, with the 2nd 9 mm. shorter and falling between the 8th and 9th (this and the small wing suggest that the bird was a female); the 3rd was 1 mm. shorter than the longest, and the 5th and 6th were 0.5 mm. and 2.0 mm. shorter respectively; the 3rd to 6th primaries were emarginated on the outer webs. Other measurements: bill (from skull), 12.5 mm.; tail, 43.5 mm.; tarsus, 18.5 mm.; weight (when trapped at 16.00 G.M.T.), 7.4 gm. The upper mandible was dark brown and the lower a pale orange-brown, rather bright; iris very dark brown; tarsus grey-brown and soles of feet dirty greenish-yellow; inside mouth mainly yellow.

In the field, when released, the bird lost much of the rather bright olive-green appearance it had had in the hand, but was still greener than a Chiffchaff or a Willow Warbler. It did not

appear grey, as K. Williamson has described some birds of the European and W. Asian form, *Ph. t. viridanus* (the only race so far recorded in the British Isles), e.g. *antea*, vol. xlv, pp. 120-121 (first-winter bird), and vol. xlix, pp. 42-43 (adult). C. B. Ticehurst, in his *A Systematic Review of the Genus Phylloscopus* (London, 1938), describes one of the E. Asian races, *Ph. t. plumbeitarsus*, as greener than *viridanus* and as having a nearly similar wing-formula, but it seemed that races other than *viridanus* must be ruled out on the combination of wing formula with the lack of any trace of a (second) wing-bar on the tips of the unabraded median coverts. H. G. Alexander (*antea*, vol. xlviii, pp. 294-295) refers to individuals of *viridanus* "with olive-brown or even almost olive-green mantle" and directs attention to "the great variety of this species".

This is a first record for Kent.

H. E. AXELL

Observations on a Corn Bunting roost in reeds.—The roosting of Corn Buntings (*Emberiza calandra*) in reed-beds in the North Kent marshes has been described by E. H. Gillham (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 328). The following observations were made at another Corn Bunting roost in reeds, at Winnall, Hampshire, in the Itchen Valley. The roost was first noticed on 13th October 1956, and the same bed of reeds was used until the end of November; after that, the buntings roosted in another part of the valley.

During the mornings and early afternoons of the period concerned small parties of Corn Buntings could be seen in the area, but not as many as appeared at the roost in the evening. This seemed to suggest that the birds were spending the day in the surrounding chalk-lands (mostly stubble and plough) and returning in the evenings to roost at Winnall. In the evenings, in fact, small parties of Corn Buntings could be seen flying in from the direction of the chalk-hills. The birds would start to arrive at the roost up to 45 minutes before sunset and small parties would continue to trickle in until just before sunset; the typical flight-note was constantly uttered as they came. On arrival, they would perch in hawthorn and willow bushes around the reed-beds, sometimes also on the branches of a dead oak. There most of them would remain, quite still, until the time came for them to enter the reeds, which was usually just before sunset; some, however, would perhaps make half-hearted attempts to preen themselves and small parties would occasionally take short flights over the surrounding marshes. Only occasionally would a bird go straight into the reeds without first stopping in the surrounding bushes. At times the numbers at the roost would rise up to about 80, but there were great fluctuations from day to day.

I have three other records of a Corn Bunting roost in reeds: perhaps the habit is commoner than reports suggest.

J. H. TAVERNER