

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF HAMPSHIRE AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

BY CAPTAIN P. W. MUNN, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U.

THE war has naturally interfered with the studies of those ornithologists who have been on active service ; but, in spite of military duties, there are few who are keen on ornithology who have not found time and opportunity to pursue, to a limited extent, their favourite hobby. There are few places where birds of some sort or other are not to be found and observed, and observance of them always brings to light some new and interesting facts. I hope later, when one can resume the arts of peace, to incorporate them in a future edition of the " Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight," which by that time will require bringing up to date. Therefore I am not now attempting any complete revision of that publication, but only adding scraps of information collected since the book appeared in 1905.

I have to thank many correspondents for valuable notes, and have made use of a good many references from Morey's " Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight," a very complete and useful book, published in 1909, and also from that excellent record of occurrences of birds in the British Isles, " British Birds."

The disastrous cold weather in the early part of 1917 had the greatest influence on the present scarcity of many of the birds resident in our country, and from which they have not yet recovered ; and for some unexplained reason the numbers of immigrants of many species also have been reduced. I hardly think that the destruction of young birds and eggs, which has been encouraged by certain clubs, is entirely responsible for this scarcity of birds, and the consequent plague of caterpillars, insects, etc., for, in many places where there was no encouragement given to destroy the young,

birds were equally scarce and caterpillars rampant. Possibly the disturbances on the Continent of Europe may have diverted the stream of migrants towards other quarters, and the great areas now occupied by camps for training troops in Britain have considerably circumscribed the districts formerly frequented by many species ; also the portions of Europe devastated by the war may have caused the bird population to seek quieter haunts in other directions.

In spite of these reasons, however, some species have continued steadily to increase their range in the county, and others, in spite of disturbances, still cling to their earlier haunts.

The Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) is becoming more and more common, and not in spite of adversity ; for I find it is still very little noticed, and not yet sought out for destruction. It is a most interesting little bird, found abroad equally by day as by night, and its melodious little bark is to be heard in most districts ; or it may be observed sitting and bobbing at you on the branch of a tree or on a post, or even on the ground, staring with its bright yellow eyes, until a too close approach sends it off with its plunging flight to safer quarters. They make delightful pets, and are easily kept in captivity. In the neighbourhood of Winchester they are common, and I have not heard that they are particularly harmful.

The Redshank annually extends its nesting area in the river valleys, and every spring may be found a little higher up the valley than it was found the year before ; or perhaps a second pair may turn up where only one pair occurred before. In the Itchen Valley it is now found as far as Brambridge, and on the Test up to Longparish ; in neither of these valleys had it been found nesting at all until recent years. The Snipe has even more numerous increased in its nesting haunts, and is now constantly found breeding in new localities. The Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla melanope*), which formerly was found nesting in comparatively few districts, and only locally during the winter, is now found universally in suitable situations throughout the year.

One of the most interesting Hampshire birds—the Stone Curlew—which may be described as common in most parts of the country, still clings to some of its former haunts, which have been occupied as training areas for troops. On Longwood Warren, a great part of which is entirely cut up with trenches, I found in 1918 a nest with two eggs actually within the bombing area in this training ground. Peewits also were still nesting there in some numbers, and Wheatears were plentiful. The curious silence of the Corncrake, whose note was formerly one of the familiar sounds in the meadows in summer, has not been satisfactorily accounted for. The birds are still there in their old haunts, though not so plentiful, but their note is rarely heard; indeed, in 1917 one heard calling in the meadows near King's Worthy was a fact worthy of making a note of. They are still frequently seen when the corn is being cut and during partridge shooting.

Cuckoos continue to visit us in the usual numbers, and were very plentiful in 1918, also Nightingales; though why the latter should continue to be plentiful, and Whitethroats, Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, and Sedge Warblers to be less numerous, is inexplicable, unless it is that they migrate by different routes, and that the stream of migration of most of the Warblers has been interrupted by the stress of Continental military operations. Of course, resident predatory birds have increased, but that is due to the less strict preservation of game—Hawks, Jays, Magpies, Crows, etc., flourishing where their persecution is relaxed. Of the Thrushes, little decrease is noticeable in the case of the Missel Thrush, but Blackbirds and Song Thrushes suffered terribly in the country districts during the hard weather in the early part of 1917. In towns the mortality was not so great, because of the food to be found around the houses. Blackbirds, perhaps, did not suffer so much as Thrushes.

An interesting nest of a Song Thrush was found at Bere Mill, near Whitchurch, in 1906. On the sill of a boarded-up window, divided by bars into five spaces, a Thrush had commenced, and partly finished, a nest in each division, until the

nest in the last space was completed and four eggs laid ; the nest in the first space being a very meagre structure, and so working up through a row of partially completed nests to the last one, in which the eggs were laid. Another nest found in March, 1906, had its foundation built of the stalks of honesty, with the seed vessels attached—a pretty and light foundation. One, in June, 1914, was built in an arch of roses in the garden of Eastfield, Longparish, and was less than 6 inches from a Greenfinch's, and both birds were seen sitting on their respective nests at the same time.

During the winter of 1917-18 Redwings and Fieldfares were almost entirely absent from the county, and a few only appeared in the spring of 1918. On July 14th, 1913, I saw a Fieldfare at Bere Mill, near Whitchurch, and an obviously injured bird near the Fulling Mill at King's Worthy on July 25th, 1917. Ring Ouzels (*Turdus torquatus*) still occur in spring and autumn migration both in the county and Isle of Wight ; and the Rev. J. E. Kelsall informs me that this autumn (1918) there are more about in the district of New Milton than usual. The nesting of this species within our boundaries has not yet been confirmed. The Robin and Hedgesparrow, homely birds, managed to survive the rigours of the hard weather of 1917 in the vicinity of houses, but in the country were very hard hit. In April, 1906, a Robin's nest was found built inside a Blackbird's in a box bush ; and during the severe frost of 1917, on March 31st, I found a Hedgesparrow's nest near Easton, Winchester, with eggs, which, however, were taken later.

Of the Warblers, I saw a Blackcap in Pritchard's Nurseries at Christchurch on March 18th, 1916. The Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus streperus*) has extended its range considerably higher up the Test and Itchen Valleys, and a nest with eggs was found in a reed bed in Brading Harbour in the Isle of Wight in 1906. The Sedge Warbler has much decreased, and the Grasshopper Warbler's note is now rarely heard. The record in the "Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight," p. 33, of a nest of the Grasshopper Warbler being taken on

the Culver Cliffs was corrected later in "A Guide to the Isle of Wight," by the Rev. E. Venables (1860), under the heading "Grasshopper Warbler," p. 419: "My friend Mr. Bury informs me that the eggs taken from the face of the Culver Cliffs, and which he supposed to belong to this bird, are a remarkable variety of those of the Rock Pipit." Mr. Poole, of Shanklin, has heard this bird in June, 1906, at Gallibury, on the Downs close to the Hump, in the Isle of Wight. I have heard of a Dipper (*Cinclus aquaticus*) being seen in the Test above Longparish on April 26th, 1912. It is of very unusual occurrence in the county.

The Goldcrest and Wren, particularly the former, have decreased considerably, but the latter is recovering again from the hard times of early 1917. For two years in succession a Goldcrest nested in a small hedge at Laverstoke; the nest was built about 3 feet above the ground, the hedge being clipped annually.

Titmice have decreased, particularly the Long-tailed species. I purchased a stuffed specimen of the Bearded Tit from Mrs. Butler, of Yarmouth, in the Isle of Wight, which is probably a specimen killed near Yarmouth. It was set up in the same case as the Crested Tit, which was obtained by Mr. Butler in the same neighbourhood. Mr. Witherby has identified this Crested Tit as belonging to the race which inhabits Germany, France, and Holland, and is the only known British example of *Parus cristatus mitratus*. It does not belong to that race which is found in Scotland, Norway, etc. In 1908 I found a nest of the Coal Tit (*Parus ater*) near Bramshott, in the nesting hole of a Sand Martin in a sand-pit.

The Wagtails are fairly hardy birds, and there does not seem to be any diminution among the various species found in the county; but, as remarked at the beginning of these notes, the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla melanope*) has considerably increased. I have found a nest of this bird built among grass at the edge of a stream, about a foot above the water level, from which the young flew in May, and dispersing in various directions on the edge of the river, their prevailing colours

of green, grey, and yellow made them most difficult to discover among the green herbage, the grey and yellow moss and weed-covered gravelly stones. Two broods in a year are frequently raised. The Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla rayii*) also has certainly increased, and I have noticed it in several localities in summer, where it had never appeared before. Mr. Wadham, of Carisbrooke, caught a Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) there in October, 1906, which he kept for some time.

There have been a few occurrences of the Golden Oriole (*Oriolus galbula*) noted lately—a female seen at Chandlersford on May 1st, 1912—and it is said to have nested near Christchurch in 1916. An adult female was brought to Mr. Wadham, of Newport, at the beginning of May, 1908, which had been struck down by a hawk. The Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius colluris*) has been quite plentiful this summer of 1918.

Of the Swallow family, I think the numbers of the Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) have decreased the most, but in 1908 they seem to have remained later than usual, as specimens were seen at Hurstbourne and Milford-on-Sea in November. The Sand Martin (*Cotile riparia*) visits us in larger numbers, and I have found some nests in holes in the sides of a large heap of refuse ashes and clinkers from a factory; also in the sides of the trenches used for bayonet-fighting practice near one of the camps, where the young were successfully reared, in spite of the trenches being used almost daily.

Of our resident Finches which suffered severely from the hard weather in 1917, and have not yet by any means recovered, Chaffinches and Greenfinches are not as abundant as they used to be. The Goldfinch, I consider, has increased, and the Bullfinch holds its own. The Hawfinch, prior to 1914, had extended its range considerably in the county, but since then has not been noticed so frequently. The Vicar of Shorwell, Isle of Wight, had a young one caught alive in his garden in July, 1907; and the Rev. P. J. Woodcock noted a pair in his garden at Longparish in January, 1917. Curiously enough, the Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) was not

noticed at all in the county during the winter of 1917-18, the same winter that Fieldfares and Redwings were so scarce. Linnets (*Linota cannabina*) continue to be abundant, and the Lesser Redpoll (*Linota rufescens*) was found nesting at Chilworth in 1907, and has also been seen near Bramshott in the summer of 1910.

Much might be written about the Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), which appeared in such numbers in the county, and other parts of Britain also, in 1908 and 1909. Mr. Wallis, of Reading, informed me that he noticed them first in the spring and summer of 1908, when they were abundant around Silchester and Aldermaston, and early in 1909 he found a nest in Pamber Forest. Numbers were seen at Laverstoke in 1909 and 1910, but no nests were found. I noticed they fed on beechnuts, as well as on larch cones, in addition to the cones of Scotch and spruce firs. A nest, with eggs, was found at Beaulieu, in the New Forest, in 1910, and the bird was noticed at Bordon in the spring of 1911. In the neighbourhood of Bournemouth, and in the town itself, they are still frequently seen. In "British Birds" of August, 1909 (Vol. III, No. 3), it is recorded that they had been seen near Botley on July 4th, and near Ringwood on the same date, also near Romsey about the same time. Mr. Witherly, writing in the same publication of March 1st, 1910 (Vol. III, No. 10), records their occurrence in November, 1909, at Langrish, near Petersfield; at Brockenhurst early in January, 1910; near Ringwood in February; and at Beaulieu also in the same winter; and from July 20th, 1909, throughout the autumn and winter until February, 1910, near Hambledon.

The Buntings are still plentiful and do not show any decrease, with the exception, perhaps, of the Corn Bunting (*Emberiza miliaria*), but this was never a very plentiful species in the county. During November and December, 1912, I saw a male Yellow Hammer, which still retained its full summer plumage. The Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) certainly has extended its range, and I hardly know any part of the county and Isle of Wight where it may not now be found,

and plentifully in some places. It is particularly noticeable in winter round corn-stacks in the company of Finches and Yellow Hammers. The Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schœniclus*) is not usually found in flocks, though in March, 1917, near Winchester, I noticed a considerable flock in the neighbourhood of some corn-stacks ; and though there were innumerable other small birds also there, the Buntings kept exclusively in a flock by themselves.

Starlings continue to be extremely abundant, and though they suffered severely in the frost of early 1917, have quite recovered their usual numbers. In December, 1906, there was a nest which contained young, already half-grown, in a tree at Freefolk.

Jays and Magpies have increased, but only owing to the lack of game-preserving, and Jackdaws do not appear to be unusually plentiful ; before the war they were killed down ruthlessly by gamekeepers, and I know some estates where they were nearly exterminated, and their joyous presence in the old trees in the parks was a thing of the past. The Hooded Crow (*Corvus corone*) occurs sparingly inland, and more frequently on the coast, in the winter. I have seen it on the Queen's Parade at Aldershot in the company of Rooks, and in October, 1908, one of a pair was shot at Laverstoke. Of the only pair of Ravens which survived at Freshwater in the Isle of Wight, one was shot in 1909, and a reward was offered for information as to the destroyers. Fresh birds were introduced there a few years later, and I have information that the species has thus been preserved in that district.

Skylarks are abundant, but though many were killed in the frost of 1917, their numbers have recovered, possibly by migrants remaining to nest in haunts formerly occupied by native-bred birds which had succumbed. The Woodlark (*Alauda arborea*) has certainly become much scarcer than in former years, and it must now be considered a rare bird in the county. Swifts (*Cypselus apus*) are plentiful, and frequently noticed as early as the end of April, and remain until the end of August and beginning of September. A pair of White-bellied Swifts (*Cypselus melba*), mounted in a

case, were sold at Steven's auction rooms on January 19th, 1910. They were said to have been shot in the New Forest in 1854, and were bought at the sale of Mr. Haydon, of Fordingbridge. They are considered genuine British specimens.

The Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europæus*) is still a regular summer visitor in its usual numbers. One was captured in a greenhouse in Emsworth in 1918. A nest with two eggs was found in 1911 or 1912 on the turf near the north side of the Tennyson Monument on Freshwater Down.

Of the Woodpeckers, the Great Spotted (*Dendrocopus major*) is still much the rarest; but the Lesser Spotted (*Dendrocopus minor*) has become plentiful, and is now found in districts where it had never been noticed before. The Green Woodpecker (*Gecinns viridis*) is common, and frequently feeds on the ground, particularly on ants. I have seen it in winter, during snow, hopping clumsily through it, searching for insects in the holes and among the tufts left uncovered.

The distribution of the Kingfisher remains about the same, returning to their nesting places usually in March. In June, 1908, a nest was found in a hole in the side of an old well which had been dug in a field near Overton. A Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) was shot on September 23rd, 1918, by Mr. Stubbs in the parish of New Milton, and is recorded in "British Birds" (Vol. XII, No. 6).

A Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) was killed at Shorwell, in the Isle of Wight, in 1910. There was one in the collection of Mrs. Butler, of Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight, which may have been that recorded by More as killed at Headon Hill Warren, near Freshwater, in June, 1855. (In the "Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight," p. 113, the date was given as "1885," which is a misprint.)

The Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) has been noticed in the New Forest and Isle of Wight. Mr. Rogers, of Freshwater, has told me that it annually passes through Freshwater in the spring, and years ago he took a nest on the east side of the bay. On November 7, 1906, one was shot at Wootton Farm in the Island. The Rev. J. E. Kelsall has a record of one seen at East Boldre Vicarage on April 2nd, 1907, and another at

Chewton Glen in March, 1913. A correspondent writes in the *Globe* of October 29th, 1910:—"I happen to know that they multiplied exceedingly in the carefully-guarded coverts of a well-known property in Hampshire. Here, several years ago, a pair of birds were seen to show some nesting inclination by a local naturalist, who thereupon persuaded the owner of the estate to isolate one secluded spinney. The result was eminently satisfactory; the progeny of this original pair have been carefully protected from molestation since, and, so far as I know, continue to thrive in their preserves." It has also been observed at Headley, near Liphook, in 1908; and Mr. F. Draper, of Basingstoke, reports one having been shot at Basing by the Rev. Griffith in September, 1913.

Cuckoos visit us plentifully, and I noticed an unusual number in 1918 feeding among the burdock on the river bank near Brambridge. After the great snowstorm on April 25th, 1908, it was curious to hear cuckoos calling when the whole country was under a sheet of snow, in some parts 2 to 3 feet deep.

Owls are still plentiful, and in the case of the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) the extraordinary and rapid extension in its range is remarkable. The Rev. J. E. Kelsall heard of one or two Little Owls at Chewton Glen in the summer of 1911, and it now nests there, as well as at Ashley Clinton, every year. Commander Lynes, R.N., has written in "British Birds" (Vol. III, No. 10) of their breeding in a quarry near Portsmouth in 1909, and of Stock Doves associating with this species in the same hole in the quarry. One was caught near Overton on November 26th, 1911. The late Mr. Corbin, of Ringwood, told me in 1913 that it nested within a mile of Ringwood on the Forest side, and in 1911 he saw young ones which must have been taken from the nest. On the west side of the Avon it had nested for some time, and a keeper he knew had reared young ones. Mr. F. Draper, of Basingstoke, shot a young male on August 20th, 1913, near the Golf Links at Basingstoke. In July, 1917, I saw it frequently in the neighbourhood of Winchester, and in 1918 commonly near Morestead and Owslebury. They are extremely noisy

little birds, and betray their whereabouts by day and by night by their curious and varied notes.

In and around Winchester the Brown Owl (*Syrnium aluco*) is common, and may be seen and heard frequently in the town itself, even in the trees in the Barracks, and Canon Vaughan tells us it nests in the Close. On January 30th, 1910, in bright sunlight on a fine frosty day, one was heard hooting continually at Laverstoke about eleven in the morning.

The Barn Owl (*Strix flammea*) is common, and often seen hunting in broad daylight. I saw one on Broxhead Common, Kingsley, in the early afternoon of April 27th, 1909, and another at Laverstoke about 7.30 p.m. on May 4th, 1909; but bright, frosty days in winter frequently bring it out hunting during the day. In April, 1907, five young Barn Owls were found in a tree in Laverstoke Park which was to be cut down; they were transferred to a neighbouring tree, and were not forsaken by the old birds in their new quarters.

The Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) still occasionally occurs in the county. One was obtained at Hook, near Basingstoke, in November, 1910; and in December, 1911, for some time one frequented the neighbourhood of Fir Grove (now Bramshott Court), near Liphook. A pair of Montagu's Harrier (*Circus cineraceus*), set up in a case, was disposed of at the sale of the effects of Woolmer Lodge, near Liphook, in 1909. They had been killed in May in the neighbourhood, but in what year I was unable to find out.

The Common Buzzard (*Buteo vulgaris*) has been obtained at Woolmer Lodge prior to 1909; also the Rough-legged Buzzard (*Archibuteo lagopus*), and an immature male of this species was trapped on Dukem Down in the Isle of Wight on March 11th, 1907. There is a note in the "Victoria History of Berkshire" stating that a Goshawk (*Astur palumbarius*) "was shot at Highclere by Mr. Maskell, a few years prior to 1886." The exact locality is not shown.

The Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) still continues to nest on the Freshwater and Culver Cliffs, and I suspect on other cliffs in the Island also; for in May, 1915, I saw it on the cliffs near Blackgang. In 1906 two pairs nested on the Freshwater

Cliffs, and quite close together, which is a most unusual occurrence. There does not seem to be much fear of this species being exterminated on the Island Cliffs, for in cases where the eggs have been taken the birds invariably lay again. Inland this Falcon frequently appears on migration, and is at that season the commonest species next to the Kestrel and Sparrow-Hawk. The late Mr. Corbin, of Ringwood, informed me that in the autumn of 1908, when Lapwings were abundant in the Avon Valley, Peregrines were frequently seen there. The Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) is still a summer visitor to the county, and several occurrences have been noticed in the Isle of Wight.

Commander Dayrell Davies, R.N., tells of one shot near Wickham in 1905; and in "British Birds" (Vol. III, No. 10) Commander H. Lynes, R.N., gives a good description of the nesting of a pair in South Hants in July, 1909, and establishes the fact that the young remain in the nest about thirty days. Mr. H. M. Wallis has written in 1906 that the border of the county near Silchester was a district for the Hobby, and he has seen it there. In the "Victoria History of Berkshire" is mentioned that the eggs of this species were taken near Burghclere in 1883. In Morey's "Natural History of the Isle of Wight" one was killed at Chale in May, 1898; another near Kingston in September, 1907; and one was obtained near Whiteley Bank in May, 1908; but up to now it has not been found breeding in the Island.

The Sparrow-Hawk and Kestrel have increased considerably; they are our commonest resident Hawks, and are left very much unmolested, as game is now so little preserved. In the early autumn many of the latter may be seen hovering over the stubble fields seeking prey, and the Sparrow-Hawks are frequently met sweeping along the hedgerows. The Kestrel rarely nests on Winchester Cathedral, but in 1916 a pair laid in an old Pigeon's nest in one of the small windows on the staircase leading to the Tower; and again in 1917, when the eggs were forsaken. The Sparrow-Hawk is not infrequently seen hovering like a Kestrel.

(To be continued.)