NOTES.

CARRION CROWS ATTACKING WOOD-PIGEON.
On January 4th, 1950, we were standing in the road beside Bolney Grange Ltd., Hurstpierpoint, Sussex, watching about 30-40 Wood-Pigeons (Columba palumbus) feeding under a tree, when we heard the harsh calls of Carrion Crows (Corvus corone). We looked up, and flying across the road in a distressed manner was a Wood-Pigeon, being harassed by two Carrion Crows, one of which had a pigeon’s feather in its bill. On the other side of the road was a ploughed field, and the crows by flying one directly above and one directly behind, were contriving to force the Wood-Pigeon to the ground. Eventually it was so low that twice it hit furrows with its breast before coming down to the ground. As soon as it went to the ground a third crow joined in and the three attacked the pigeon with their beaks and claws.

We eventually managed to scramble to the scene of the battle and the crows retired to an oak tree when we were nearly on top of them. However, the pigeon was in such a poor state we had to kill it.

D. P. GEOGHEGAN AND M. H. FILEMAN.

[A similar incident has been recorded from Wiltshire (antea, vol. xl, p. 14.—EDS.].

CARRION CROWS NESTING ON BUILDINGS.
No mention is made in The Handbook of the Carrion Crow (Corvus corone) nesting on buildings. On April 12th, 1948, I watched a Carrion Crow fly from Waterloo direct to the crown on top of the spire over the House of Commons, go inside it, and stay there for about a quarter of an hour without coming out. I then went away. On April 18th, 1948, I saw a Carrion Crow come out of the crown of the same spire. In November or December, 1949, Mr. Sidney Larkin, the famous steeplejack, found a large nest on top of that same spire. He described it in The Sunday Times of December 25th, 1949. In London’s Birds (pp. 29-30,) Mr. R. S. R. Fitter says that Carrion Crows nested in the Victoria Tower, House of Lords, in 1934.

C. SUFFERN

UNUSUAL CALL OF CARRION CROW.
Throughout the spring and summer of 1949 a Carrion Crow (Corvus corone) in the area round my house at Colyford, Devon, frequently uttered what is to me an unusual call, consisting of anything up to fourteen or fifteen short and rapidly recurring croaks, sounding rather like a distant machine gun or woodpecker’s drumming (but in a much deeper bass tone). It is made gutturally.

A. L. W. MAYO.

THE CONDUCT OF STARLINGS IN A TRAP.
During the past two winters, 77 Starlings (Sturnus vulgaris) were caught in a non-automatic trap for ringing, at Richmond, Surrey. A marked difference was noted in the conduct of birds caught separately as compared with those in the company of others.
Some birds were caught in batches, four together (once), three together (twice) and two together (sixteen times). Without exception, these birds uttered no sound when driven in company into the gathering cage or during the operation of ringing.

A single Starling was caught in company with House-Sparrows (Passer domesticus) on three occasions, and these three were also silent.

Thirty-two Starlings were caught singly, of which eight were silent. The remaining twenty-four, which included adults and juveniles, when taken from the gathering cage, and a few even before being handled, gave the alarm note described as a harsh rasping scream, sometimes continuing for a considerable period. This conduct seems to imply a fear of being alone in a bird which is gregarious in winter, and a call for help from the remainder of the flock.

C. L. COLLENETTE.

TRANSATLANTIC VOYAGE OF STARLINGS.

The following account has been sent to me by Captain P. St. J. R. Mountford, of the M/V “Pellicula”: “On our last passage from home some Starlings (Sturnus vulgaris) came on board the ship in Falmouth and remained until we arrived at Maracaibo, Venezuela. We sailed from Falmouth at 17.00 on October 29th, 1949, passing through the Azores and close to Martinique and Curacao, but the birds only left us when we were right inside the lagoon at Maracaibo. The first day out we counted seven birds. I regret to say that the Chinese members of the crew caught two and ate them, but the others took up quarters aft, near the galleys, by day, and every evening at sunset they would fly up to the mainmast crosstrees and stay there till dawn. They became quite friendly, but towards the end looked a little bedraggled, though still full of life.

So far as I can find out they ate cockroaches of which there are quite a number on the ropes aft. According to some reports they seemed to like potatoes and I know that they were eating fish as the Chinese stewards hang up fish until it is very high and I could see their beak marks on some of it.

Nobody saw them leave the ship, but all five were seen on the day we arrived at the entrance to the lagoon; they were gone by the time we got alongside on November 12th.”

PETER SCOTT.

FEMALE LINNET SINGING.

On June 26th, 1949, whilst walking along the Icknield Way, near Swyncombe Downs, Oxfordshire, we heard a song from the hedge-row, which, though not altogether unfamiliar, could not for a few moments be identified. The singer was easily located and proved to be a Linnet (Carduelis cannabina), obviously a female and not a juvenile male. As we were only a few yards from the bird we were able to note plumage details, and others in our company agreed on the sex of the bird.
Song in the female of this species does not appear to have been recorded, and it may be of interest to note that, although not as fully-developed as that of the male bird, our songster’s performance contained several pleasant and typically Linnet-like phrases. Unfortunately she flew off before it became clear whether she could sustain the song for as long as the male usually does.

H. F. GREENFIELD AND W. G. TEAGLE.

CORN-BUNTING ROOST IN MORAY.

On December 24th, 1948, at about 15.15 I saw between twenty and thirty Corn-Buntings (*Emberiza calandra*) perched on an overhead power line in swamppy rush-covered ground alongside the Elgin-Lossiemouth road. In the next twenty minutes the number increased to about a hundred and fifty, small parties of five or six coming in from all directions and from a distance of a mile or more. When it was almost dark I returned to the area and found a large number of Corn-Buntings roosting in tussocks of rushes, near the power line and in an apparently limited area.

At dusk on December 26th there were a dozen or so birds on the cable but the roosting area was not examined. On January 1st, 1949, between 15.30 and 16.00 there were no Corn-Buntings in the area.

R. HEWSON.

[Mr. Hewson’s observations agree closely with those recorded (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 328) by Mr. Gillham in Kent.—EDS.].

"FLY-CATCHING" FLIGHT OF REED-BUNTING.

On March 7th, 1950, we observed a Reed-Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) hawking insects near Frenchay, Gloucestershire. It was one of a flock and had perched on the top of a hawthorn. It flew up about three feet from its perch, half-hovered for a few seconds, rather like a singing Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), and then dropped back. Soon after, the flock flew away; so there was no chance of seeing if the action was repeated. This behaviour is apparently not recorded in *The Handbook*.

M. TUCKER AND J. P. G. ROWCLIFFE.

[This record may be compared with that already published (*antea*, p. 222) of a "soaring flight" by Reed-Bunting.—EDS.].

REACTIONS OF COCK HOUSE-SPARROW TO THE DEATH OF HEN.

On June 12th, 1949, at Calne, Wiltshire, at 12.45, on hearing very loud chirping of sparrows outside my bedroom window, I looked out and saw a cock House-Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) displaying to a hen crouched in a nearly horizontal position with drooped wings. He tried several times to mate with her, getting no response, and in a few minutes she was hanging nearly vertically, with her head in the fork of a twig, and obviously quite dead. She was in a leafless part of a very old lilac tree, and only a few feet from, and level with, my window, so that I could see very clearly all that happened.
The cock continued hopping round her, quivering his wings and pecking gently at her head and all along her back. He continued this all day, and I do not think left the bush all day except for a few minutes in the evening.

At 17.50 there were five hens in the bush and he displayed to them and to the corpse, chirping loudly, and repeatedly wiping his beak on the branch about one foot away from the corpse. He drove off the hens, but one remained, and later two returned.

June 13th, 5.00. The cock was already at his distressful chirping and beak-wiping, which he kept up all day. At 16.00 he displayed all round the body and only a few inches away. At 19.00 he was displaying to another hen in the bush.

June 14th, 4.45. The same performance began again, generally only two or three inches from the corpse. He displayed in the morning to another hen, who fluttered her wings at him. He flew to her and they touched beaks; then he drove her off the bush. Later a hen made a chirring noise at him. He flew to her, touched beaks, and flew off, followed by her, but he was back beside the corpse in a few minutes.

On June 15th, 16th and 17th he spent most of his time from early morning by the corpse, chirping, but less distressfully, and preening himself. Each day he flew off for longer periods, once, on June 15th, in answer to chirring from the next tree.

On June 18th the cock was sitting beside the corpse, but preening thoroughly and only occasionally chirping contentedly.

I did not see the cock again, but on June 22nd a hen sparrow was tugging feathers from the corpse for some minutes, and on June 23rd the corpse had disappeared, probably into the undergrowth below.

E. M. Thouless.

SKY-LARKS' NESTS WITH "DOORSTEPS."

On reading the note (antea, p. 17) on a Sky-Lark's (Alauda arvensis) nest with "doorstep" of chalk nodules I was reminded of a nest which I found last year on Portsdown Hill, Hants, which had small pieces of chalk at the grass entrance.

In 1950 I paid particular attention to an area on Portsdown Hill which is a favourite breeding ground of the Sky-Lark. Of seven nests found six had these "doorsteps" consisting in most cases of hard chalky stones and flints, varying in size from a pea to a trouser button. Most stones were flat in shape and varied in number, one nest had two, two had five, and one had almost a "path" from the nest perimeter to about 2½ inches away. All the stones were loose and could not have got there accidentally; there are patches of ground devoid of vegetation and covered with large and small stones and pieces of chalk quite a distance from the nests examined.

I have not overlooked the possibility of the stones having been scraped out from the ground by the bird prior to nest-building.

H. E. Woods.
BEHAVIOUR, DISPLAY AND FEEDING-HABITS OF WHITE WAGTAIL IN WINTER-QUARTERS.

I NOTE that The Handbook states of the White Wagtail (Motacilla a. alba): “In winter quarters singly or in small parties or in flocks . . . .” My own observations of this bird may be of interest although perhaps not applicable to the subspecies over the greater part of its range, as they were confined to Lower Egypt, the coastal districts of Eastern Libya, and Malta, where, however, the bird is abundant in winter, in the first two places extremely so.

I found that the birds usually associated in pairs, or at least a male and female together. Even in the wet fields of the Nile Valley with their dense wagtail population the tendency to split up into pairs was very noticeable. The only time when single birds were observed with any frequency was in autumn, (possibly birds still on passage ?), and in late March and April after most of the males had left (Egypt).

Close observation of a “pair” near Cairo in the winter of 1944-45, revealed that they shared a common territory—perhaps “foraging-area” would be a safer term since they frequently flew off for short periods and the boundaries, if any, were very ill-defined. They went away each evening and may have gone to separate roosts, as the female usually arrived about twenty minutes before the male in the morning.

I never saw any definite display by the male, but the female at his approach would frequently—and invariably as he alighted on his arrival in the mornings—assume a rigid posture with head and tail held at an angle of about 45 degrees, sometimes following up by adopting the cringing, wing-quivering posture similar to that of a hen Canary or Greenfinch (Chloris chloris) soliciting her mate. Sometimes the male would terminate this performance by darting at her with snapping bill in the manner they both used when driving off sparrows.

Flight was normally initiated by the male, who would take wing and call, the female usually rising at once with an answering cry, but sometimes not doing so until he was some little distance away and on two occasions refusing to follow in spite of his repeated calling.

The male disappeared about the middle of March and the female was last seen on April 18th.

This pair seemed to feed chiefly on breadcrumbs that were put out for them. House-flies were pursued, often without success. The workers of a large black ant were ignored, but the winged males and queens were greedily devoured.

With the exception of the morning arrival of birds to the feeding territory, and the rare refusal of the female to follow the male when he took flight, all the above details of behaviour were noted on very many occasions with other White Wagtails in all of the countries mentioned.

DEREK GOODWIN,
The following display by a female White Wagtail has not—so far as I can find—been recorded, and was more elaborate than that mentioned in The Handbook for captive birds (W. E. Teschemaker) and in Romania (F. C. R. Jourdain).

February 1st, 1946, Almaza, Egypt. Pair feeding near each other on lawn, female suddenly taking up crouched position with head slightly raised, wings drooped and quivering; this then developed into an elaborate display with tail fully expanded and erected vertically; the under tail-coverts and tail then resembled a conspicuous white fan when viewed from behind. The male near by took no notice of this fascinating display, which lasted approximately one minute; the female then continued to feed in company with the male, and no more display was given before they flew away together. Boase's description in The Handbook of the striking display of a male Pied Wagtail (Motacilla alba yarrellii) is almost identical, but the following display of female Pied Wagtail mentioned in The Handbook ("Once observed to creep or shuffle round male with wings and tail moderately expanded and head lowered") falls far short of the elaborate display I witnessed.

Notes on Pied Wagtail (Motacilla alba yarrellii) feeding on bread (antea, vol. xlii, p. 30; xliii, p. 94) have reminded me of some observations I made on the White Wagtail (Motacilla a. alba) in the desert area of Almaza, Egypt. The following details should not be taken to suggest that wagtails never take bread, but to bring to notice the habit of some birds I had under regular observation in the desert, and which could easily have been mistaken for bread-eating. The White Wagtail arrives in this area during the first week of October and is fairly common until the end of March, but a few odd birds can be seen until the third week of April. On a number of occasions during March, 1946, I observed White Wagtails pecking at pieces of pastry and bread left on the sand. I first of all took it for granted that they were eating the bread and pastry, but after watching them more closely through binoculars I noticed frequently that after the pecking they watched the bread intently and then picked at it and obtained some morsel which was eaten. This prompted me to inspect the bread and pastry, and I found this food contained numerous small red ants which had concealed themselves in it. My further observations showed that fresh bread placed on the desert held no interest for these birds, but the old bread, etc., containing the ants, did. It is possible that the bread-taking habit in the Pied Wagtail developed in similar circumstances.

C. A. WHITE.

[It will be noted that Mr. White's observations on feeding habits differ from those recorded by Mr. Goodwin, who informs us (in litt.) that there is no doubt that the birds he watched were eating bread-crumbs.—E.Ds.].

"BITTERN-POSTURE" OF NUTHATCH.

From many observations of the Nuthatch (Sitta europæa) mainly
in Wychwood Forest, Oxon, 1928-42, and at Mortimer, Berks., 1942-
48, I have noted that the loud monosyllabic spring call of this species
("pee-pee-pee") is usually delivered when the bird is in a rigid,
bittern-like posture, *i.e.*, with the lower mandible, throat and
ventral surface on a vertical plane. In this position the white
throat is very conspicuous. A position at the junction of a branch
to the main trunk seems to be favoured for this call—so much so
that at times it almost appears as if the bird were using the trunk
as a support to its back.

W. D. CAMPBELL.

SAND-MARTINS ROOSTING ON SHORE.

Before the war I sometimes, during August, saw Sand-Martins
(*Riparia riparia*) landing on the shore on the Camber side of Rye
Harbour, but I was always on my way home and the birds were
on the wrong side of the river, and so I never investigated.

On August 6th, 1949, near dusk, E. H. Gillham and I saw some
250 birds settling down on a sand and shingle spit near the Rother
and found that they were roosting in half-tunnels or grooves which
they worked with their bodies in the sand, or were among hollows
in the stones on the ridge. Although not on the sea side of the
spit some of the birds would have to move when the tide came in.
The following day E.H.G. found birds roosting there, and two days
later I watched a migrating flock settling down there for a short,
agitated rest before going on westwards.

E. M. CAWKELL.

GOSHAWK IN SUSSEX.

On September 24th, 1949, we observed a Goshawk (*Accipiter
gentilis*) in the Lower Ouse Valley at Piddinghoe, Sussex.

A number of distant views through glasses showed a large round-
winged hawk with the typical hunting flight of a Sparrow-Hawk
(*Accipiter nisus*).

Subsequently the bird perched on a thorn bush some 30 yards
away, and we then saw that it approximated in size of body to a
female Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) (a bird with which we
are both familiar) but was of greater length than this bird, owing
to its long tail. Also noted were the dark brown back, light under-
parts and breast, the latter having dark bars, and the long yellow
legs.

When flight was resumed, it consisted of a few flaps of the wings,
followed by a glide at a height not exceeding 15 feet from the ground.
On being mobbed by a number of Jackdaws and Starlings, the
hawk rose to a considerable height and then left the area by means
of a long glide.

A number of visits to the area after September failed to
produce the bird again.

L. P. ALDER AND C. M. JAMES.

HERONS SUN-BATHING AND SITTING ON GROUND.

With reference to the note (*antea*, p. 125) on sun-bathing by Herons
(*Ardea cinerea*), there were, at about 11.00 on July 7th, 1946, six
Herons by the river near Alnmouth, Northumberland, and of these,
three were sun-bathing in exactly the same attitude as that described by A. W. Boyd. When I first saw them they were facing the sun and occasionally did a little preening; later they turned with their backs to the sun maintaining the sun-bathing attitude. On this subject the following quotation from page xii of Audubon's introductory address to his *Ornithological Biography* which is the letter-press to his *Birds of America* may be of interest. He says "The Heron when warming itself in the sun will sometimes drop its wings several inches as if they were dislocated." This was published in 1831 and is possibly one of the earliest records of sun-bathing.

The Heron to which he referred was no doubt the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), a very similar bird to ours.

Another occurrence which I think must be very unusual happened at the same place at about 18.00 on August 5th, 1949, when, of five Herons which were present and resting close together, three, which were birds of the year, were sitting on the ground. It may be irrelevant, but it was a hot evening with a temperature of over 70 degrees in the shade.

**H. Tully.**

In hot sunshine at 12.30, on May 11th, 1950, I noticed an adult Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) sunning itself on a dead branch at the edge of Crichel Lake, Dorset, facing directly towards me and the sun, at about eye-level. It was standing very upright, with neck almost fully extended, bill nearly horizontal, both wings symmetrical and partly extended at shoulders and elbows, but flexed at the carpal joints, looking at first sight not unlike a Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) "hanging out to dry." Closer inspection, with binoculars and telescope, showed clearly that the wing-tips were overlapping well in front of the bird's legs, covering most of the legs, but leaving the feet visible, and that the under-surfaces of the wings were facing upwards and forwards in a plane apparently about 45 degrees or less from the horizontal, almost at right angles to the sun's rays, and from 90 to 120 degrees from the expected plane in the normal standing position. The under wing-coverts and body plumage did not appear ruffled, as they commonly are in sun-bathing Passerines. This contortionist posture was maintained for several minutes, without visible movement apart from occasional turning of the head, when it could be seen that the bill was often opened as if the bird were panting. It then suddenly turned sideways and gave a perfectly clear view of the inclination of its wings, for a second or two before folding them back into the normal position. Before flying off, some minutes later, it leisurely preened its flank and under-wing feathers, followed by a thorough scratching of its neck and throat, first with one foot and then the other. From the dull yellowish colour of its bill, and its pale fleshy brown legs, I should judge it to have been at or near the end of its breeding cycle. **K. B. Rooke.**

We have received similar accounts of Herons sun-bathing from Messrs. Bernard King and N. G. B. Jones and R. A. F. Gillmor. Mr. King who watched a bird at Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset, on
October 9th, 1949, states that it stretched out its wings after the manner of a Cormorant. Messrs. Jones and Gillmor watched a bird at a lake near Reading, on June 3rd, 1950, which "with its head and neck stretched up and its wings unfolded and drooping had the appearance to the naked eye of a large grey bottle." Mr. C. F. Tunnicliffe has published a picture of Herons sitting down in his Mereside Chronicle, p. 113.—Eds.

FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF COMMON HERON.

On frequent occasions in the late springs of 1948 and 1949 a method of feeding by Common Herons (Ardea cinerea) not recorded in The Handbook was observed at Rockland Broad in Norfolk.

Rockland Broad is a shallow lake of some thirty or forty acres which in spring becomes rather choked with water-lilies and other weeds, more so than any of the other large Broads. At none of the other Broads have I seen Herons behaving in this way.

The most typical routine is this: the bird passes across the Broad from one side to the other, usually against the wind, from six to ten feet above the surface, its neck held forwards, slightly upwards, moving so slowly as to be almost hovering at times. Sometimes it stalls and drops down for a second as if to strike before rising again. When it reaches the other side of the Broad or where the reeds are too congested it flies swiftly back to the other side and begins again. When it finally decides to strike it stalls, drops on to the water, usually feet first so that most of the rear of the body submerges, but most often it keeps the wings outstretched at about 60° from the surface, and at the moment of landing jabs its beak under the surface and usually grabs a fish. It then rises and takes the fish, which may be from about four to nine inches long, to the shore to devour, or else, as on May 28th, 1949, swallows it in the air, though with difficulty. On other occasions birds were seen to alight on the water without this premeditated flight, and sometimes seize a fish. Usually the bill entered the water up to about three-quarters of its length, but sometimes both head and neck were submerged. Both fully adult and first year birds were observed to do this. I have no proof that the fish were not dead ones, but M. E. Giles, who on one occasion saw similar behaviour, recorded a fish which was waggling furiously when caught. Moreover there is no reason to believe that there are so many dead fish in this Broad.

Here are the chronological records:

May 13th, 1948. One bird beat over the Broad against the wind, made one false attempt to land, then landed in deep water without attempting to catch a fish, but swam for about two seconds before rising. Another beat twice over the Broad against the wind, three times landing, bill first, then feet, and remaining with head and neck completely under the water, but body in normal swimming position, wings held in. On no occasion did it bring up a fish. Later it repeated beating over the Broad without diving.
April 18th, 1949. One beat across the Broad, landed feet first, wings held out, jabbed forward and downward into the water and seized a big fish, with which it rose, and took it to the shore.

May 2nd. One beat the Broad against the wind three times before catching a fish.

May 14th. One flying against the wind landed and caught a small fish. One other made an unpremeditated landing but did not bring up any fish.

May 21st. One made a landing and caught a fish which it devoured on the bank and later passed over the surface of the Broad in the typical way as if intending to do the same.

May 28th. One caught a fish in the typical fashion and swallowed it when it had risen in the air.

June 4th. One flew once against the wind over the surface but did not strike.

June 25th. One made an unpremeditated landing and rose with its bill crammed with food.

July 9th. One performed the typical flight over the water and made a false attempt to land.

On all these occasions when a bird landed it is probable that it did not touch the bottom with its feet. On one or two occasions it is just possible that one did so.

On May 14th, 1949, one bird which had perched on a five-foot post dropped off on to the water directly below, immediately thrusting its bill in and seizing a fish which it devoured when it returned to the post (cf. anteia, vol. xxxvii, p. 37).

I have no winter records for this behaviour at all.

R. G. PETTITT.

["Hovering over surface of water in attempt to catch surface-swimming fish" is recorded in The Handbook (Supplementary Additions and Corrections, p. 14) as "exceptional," but the behaviour reported by Mr. Pettitt seems to be more systematic and regular. Mr. F. A. Lowe, to whom we have submitted this note, informs us that he has a note of three previous records of such behaviour (Ardea, vol. 32, p. 280; vol. 33, p. 258; Ostrich, 8 : 1, July, 1937) in connexion with his forthcoming monograph on the species. Other cases of somewhat similar behaviour have been recorded (anteia, vol. xxxvi, p. 246; vol. xxxviii, p. 256) and there are several records of Herons beating into the wind to pick up dead fish from the surface of the water—see The London Bird Report (1948, pp. 17-18) —Eds.].

AERIAL CHASE BY HERONS IN AUTUMN.

On September 7th, 1949, I witnessed an aerial chase between two Common Herons (Ardea cinerea) over Ham sewage farm, Old Windsor, Berks. The birds were flying at an average height of about 50 feet and the chase lasted for several minutes. From time to time, when fairly close together both birds extended their legs downwards as though about to settle, and the leading bird extended
its neck more or less fully at an upward angle of about 45°. At the same time it opened and closed its bill which was pointing almost vertically, but it was not heard to utter any call. Eventually they both settled at the edge of the same bed some 50 yards apart and took no further notice of each other. From The Handbook it would appear that such chases in autumn are uncommon.

C. M. Veysey.

[Mr. F. A. Lowe informs us (in litt.) that he has observed similar incidents, which he regards as territorial fights to secure feeding-places.—Eds.]

NOTES ON THE WING-DRYING OF SHAGS.

We note with interest the remarks about wing-drying of Cormorants (Phalacrocorax carbo) on the water, details of which appear in British Birds, vol. xlii, p. 250, and vol. xliii, p. 159.

A similar type of behaviour on the part of a Shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis) was witnessed by us off the coast just north of Arbroath, Angus, on June 3rd, 1950. The bird was swimming with two Cormorants about 150 yards from the edge of the cliffs. We watched these birds moving along for several minutes before the Shag raised its wings and held them in an up-raised, half-spread position, continuing to move along at the head of the party. After about half a minute the wings were lowered and the bird resumed its normal posture.

On the day in question, the sun was beating down ceaselessly and the air was very still, so that temperatures ran high.

The behaviour of this particular bird thus differs, in one respect, from the records for Cormorants in that the bird continued to swim along the surface of the water while half-spread its wings in the drying position.

Incidentally, on looking through The Handbook at the habits of the birds here referred to, we see that no mention is made of representative times spent in "drying out" by these two species. We give here details of the duration of wing-drying in the Shag (Phalacrocorax aristotelis) together with some incidental observations.

On June 25th, 1950, while inspecting 31 Shags standing together on a large rock in the sea below the cliffs just north of Arbroath, we noticed an immature Shag on a lower shelf of the rock standing with outstretched wings. The bird was facing a rather cool stiff breeze at this juncture and was wafting its wings slowly through a small angle. For 32 minutes longer the Shag held them out in the drying position. During the first 12 minutes the wings were wafted continuously, and for most of this time the rate of movement averaged 12 beats a minute. Sometimes, however, the rate dropped until hardly any movement was visible, while at other times it was speeded up, even to a stage where it became a violent flapping of the wings. Occasionally during this procedure, the bird carried out momentary preening movements by running the bill through
the breast feathers or scapulars. Over the next 16 minutes the half-spread wings were held motionless, while the bird turned side­ways on to the breeze. After this, it again turned to face the breeze, stretching its wings out fully, beating them for a short time, and finally holding them motionless for a further 3½ minutes. On closing its wings the bird commenced preening.

The weather at the time was fine and warm with the sun behind light cloud. A strongish S.W. breeze was blowing.

M. W. Pickering and H. M. Pickering.

TURTLE-DOVE DISPLAY.

Records already published (antea, vol. xxxix, pp. 29 and 284; xlii, p. 154; xlili, p. 127) indicate that wing-clapping may accompany the display-flight of the Turtle-Dove (Streptopelia turtur). I can add several further instances.

On the afternoon of April 26th, 1947, I was present in a conifer belt in open country near Westley, Suffolk. Two or three Turtle­Doves were heard in song. One bird was noted near by, perched on the top of a spruce fir, from which it rose in display flight, climbing quite steeply with its tail spread, and clapping its wings in a loud manner near the apex of the climb. It then broke into a long downward glide with wings and tail outspread, to alight in another tree, some distance from the one which it had left.

On July 8th, 1950, a bird was seen to rise in display flight from the top of a pine on Rampart Field, near Lackford, Suffolk. Towards the apex of the ascent it was heard to beat its wings loudly four or five times, before breaking into the downward glide. It was then lost to view.

Again, on July 13th, 1950, in Tuddenham Fen, nr. Mildenhall, Suffolk, wing-clapping (six or seven times in each case) was recorded with display flights made by two different birds. D. V. Butt.

[It is evident that this behaviour is more normal than was sup­posed when The Handbook was in preparation.—Eds.].

NEST LINING OF WADING BIRDS.

In British Birds (vol. xl. 23-24) I gave some details to show what a substantial accumulation of nesting material is often found in the nest of a wading bird, to insulate the eggs against damp.

The instances cited were of the Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus), the Curlew (Numenius arquata) and the Oyster-catcher (Haematopus ostralegus).

In 1947 I arranged with the watcher on a colony of Avocets (Recurvirostra avosetta) in Suffolk to have a nest sent to me after the eggs hatched. This nest completely filled a box made to hold six tennis-balls and contained at least 800 separate pieces of material, mostly dried stems of rush-grass and small pieces of grass.

A much more remarkable instance was observable at a colony of Avocets in the same county in 1949. I found an isolated nest with four eggs on May 23rd in some broken ground which was dry at the time but liable to flooding after heavy rain or spring tides.
This nest was a small pad of grass and Salicornia, very similar in size to the ordinary Lapwing's nest on a field. On May 26th I visited it with Mr. Eric Hosking and Mr. George Edwards after a day of torrential rain which had flooded the surrounding flat with at least half an inch of water. The nest was now a huge "soup-plate" affair of Salicornia with a rim at least two inches high, and deeply cupped like the nest of a Song-Thrush (Turdus ericetorum).

Unfortunately this nest hatched a few days later before it could be photographed, but it was subsequently sent to me and the mass of material filled a fair-sized cardboard box. Though damaged in transit, it was in bulk as big as a thrush's nest.

Another pair of Avocets in the same area were incubating a nest on a tiny exposed flat. During a high tide and a strong wind, the water was clearly lapping all round the eggs. Both birds could be seen for several hours standing side by side over the nest and apparently picking up pieces of nesting material and sometimes flicking them sideways with their bills. This nest successfully hatched, but was not examined during incubation.

These two instances suggest that in times of flood, wading birds will occasionally add to their nests, as Black-headed Gulls, Moorhens and Little Grebes undoubtedly do, to insulate the eggs from wet.

J. K. STANFORD.

UNRECORDED NOTE OF CURLEW.

On September 8th, 1948, I was standing on the shore of Lough Leane, Killarney, when I witnessed a most spectacular fly-past of Curlew (Numenius arquata) on passage. Diving down over the tree-tops, they made a complete circle low over the lake and then continued on their way to the south, climbing rapidly. The birds, which numbered about 200, came over in four or five waves, and from one of these waves came a continuous conversation of low grunts, which may be rendered "ark ark." The note was very reminiscent of the conversational gabble of the Pink-footed Goose (Anser fabalis brachyrhynchus). It does not seem referable to any of the descriptions given in The Handbook.

D. G. ANDREW.

THREAT-DISPLAY OF COMMON SNIPE.

On September 3rd, 1949, on the bed of a shrinking West Riding reservoir, I watched a Common Snipe (Capella gallinago) going through a type of behaviour of which I can find no previous record. It was being mobbed by a Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus), when it suddenly flattened itself out and turning its head upward and backward presented its beak to the aggressor in a type of threat-display. This lasted only a few seconds, but appeared to have the effect of sending the Lapwing away.

JOHN C. S. ELLIS.

FOOD-WASHING BY KNOT IN CAPTIVITY.

On December 4th, 1948, a wounded Knot (Calidris canutus) was found by two boys on the shore at Leasowe, Cheshire. It was given to me for treatment, but eventually died on December 17th.
While in captivity it was supplied with earthworms, slugs and other food, and by December 11th had begun to react to the offer of food by a quiet note "wock," or by running to the edge of its cage and tapping on the wire. It was noted that large worms were "softened up" by a process of rapidly passing the bill up and down the body with a biting action. When treating worms in this way on the sand floor of its cage the bird frequently carried them over to the water trough and washed them by shaking in the water before continuing the "softening up" process. Scraps of meat and fat were also treated in this way, but not worms or scraps which were small enough to be swallowed immediately.

W. T. C. RANKIN.

ROSEATE TERNs IN DEVON.
On May 22nd, 1949, while watching, on the Exe estuary, a flock of about 100 Common Terns (Sterna hirundo), with which were four Sandwich Terns (S. sandvicensis) and one Little Tern (S. albifrons), I had an excellent view of a Roseate Tern (S. dougallii). I was first made aware of its presence by noticing its pale upper plumage, conspicuous among the greyer-backed Common Terns, a party of which it was accompanying in flight. As it passed within a few yards of me I was able to see its wholly black beak, pink breast and the tail streamers at least as long as those of its companions, as well as its similarity in size to the Common Terns. I subsequently found that there were two Roseates present, both being seen several times in flight with the whole flock, their pale upper plumage giving them the appearance of albinos among the other birds. The breast of one bird was a deeper pink than the other's. This appears to be the first record of Roseate Terns in Devon since 1874, when two were seen in Plymouth Sound (Zoologist, 1874, p. 4105).

R. G. ADAMS.

HERRINGLE GULLS EATING CHARCOAL.
On November 6th, 1949, from the promenade at Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire, I noticed a group of about 20 Herring-Gulls (Larus argentatus), both adult and immature, on the beach, gathered around the remains of a bonfire of the previous night. On closer examination I found that the birds were picking up and swallowing quite large pieces of charcoal, on an average about 2 ins. in length. This seemed to me to be extraordinary behaviour, and I am rather doubtful whether it is possible for a bird to digest such large pieces of carbonaceous material.

R. T. HARBERD.

[B pure carbon is not digestible by any vertebrate animal.—Eds.]

BATHING BEHAVIOUR OF HERRING-GULL.
On October 30th, 1949, in the harbour at Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire, we observed the following behaviour on the part of a Herring-Gull (Larus argentatus). The bird in question was swimming in water in close proximity to a mud bank, together with several more Herring-Gulls. It was bathing in the usual way by flapping its half-open wings in the water, but frequently it varied this
procedure by turning right over on its back, with tail feathers spread out, wings beating, and legs kicking in the air. This behaviour was repeated on several occasions during the time of observation, which was about 20 mins. No such behaviour was noted in any of the surrounding gulls. The water where this occurred was brackish. The above observation was made at a range of about 20 yards, using 8×50 binoculars.

R. T. HARBERD AND K. J. WITTS.

SKUA-LIKE TACTICS OF GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

ALTHOUGH The Handbook states that the Great Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus) robs other species of food, it is not stated that one method of doing this is by pursuing the victim closely, after the manner of skuas, and forcing it to disgorge food already swallowed. I first observed this on October 2nd, 1948, on the Exe estuary, when I saw two immature Great Black-backs chasing an adult Herring-Gull (Larus argentatus). One of the pursuers gave up the chase, but the other continued and presently, as it overhauled its quarry from below, the latter arched its head and neck and opened its beak wide. I did not see food fall, but the Great Black-back turned away. Soon after an adult Great Black-back was seen pursuing an adult Herring-Gull which eventually arched its neck and disgorged food, the Black-back descending to the water to retrieve it. On October 31st an adult Great Black-back was seen to force an adult Herring-Gull to disgorge a large, shapeless mass of food, which was also retrieved on the water below.

R. G. ADAMS.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL DROPPING FOOD FROM HEIGHT.

As only two records have been published (antea, vol. xl, p. 317; xli, p. 250) of Great Black-backed Gulls (Larus marinus) dropping food from a height, a third may be of interest. On December 13th, 1942, on the Exe estuary, an adult Great Black-back was seen to carry a rather large, but unidentified object into the air to a height of about twenty feet and let it fall to the mud. Descending after it the bird shook it about for a while. This was repeated seven more times, after which I left the bird still trying to dispose of the food.

R. G. ADAMS.

RUBBER IN THE GIZZARD OF A KITTIWAKE.

On February 21st, 1950, a freshly dead female Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla) was picked up on the shore at Hurst Castle, Hampshire. The bird was thin and gave the impression of having been gale starved during the stormy weather of the previous week.

On dissection five pieces of rubber bands were found rolled tightly together in the gizzard. One band was complete but the other four were broken. The average length of the pieces was 2.9 inches, the longest being 4 1/2 inches and the shortest 1 1/2 inches in length.

It seems likely that the hungry bird picked the floating pieces
from the water in mistake for food. There was nothing else in the gizzard and the stomach too was as good as empty.

JOHN H. CROOK AND BARRY GOATER.

[Reference has been made (antea, vol. xxx, p. 374) to the taking of rubber by gulls, though the species responsible was not identified. Mr. Robert Atkinson records in Island Going (p. 71) that he found a red rubber balloon in the pellet of a Great Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus) on North Rona.—Eds.].

VOICE OF SPOTTED CRAKE.
The Spotted Crake (Porzana porzana) is a regular summer visitor to south and mid-Wales, and I have frequently heard the "crack" call described (antea, vol. xlii, p. 364) by P. F. Holmes. A Spanish dancer, when dancing without castanets and snapping her fingers instead, imitates the call of the Spotted Crake exactly. When paired and nesting the birds rarely call in the manner described and then only for a short time when disturbed. They also make a low grunting noise which is unmistakable and is quite unlike the groan of the Water-Rail (Rallus aquaticus).

H. A. GILBERT.

UNUSUAL LEG COLOUR OF MOORHEN.
On August 18th, 1949, at Earlswood Lakes, Warwickshire, I observed an immature Moorhen (Gallinula chloropus) with bright yellow legs. The Handbook gives the colour of the legs of the immature Moorhen as olive green.

J. SEARS.

"INJURY-FEIGNING" OF YELLOW WAGTAIL.—With reference to the note (antea, vol. xlii, p. 243), Mr. E. J. M. Buxton has drawn our attention to a previous record of "injury-feigning" by Yellow Wagtail (Motacilla flava flavissima) published in British Birds, vol. xi, p. 50.

FIRECRESTS IN ENGLAND, 1948-49.—A record of a Firecrest (Regulus ignicapillus), additional to those already published (antea, p. 153), has been supplied by Mr. R. A. O. Hickling who states that on January 1st, 1949, Messrs. J. K. Bates and M. J. Thomas identified one at the Eye Brook Reservoir on the Leics.-Rutland border.

LONG-TAILED DUCK IN STAFFORDSHIRE.—Mr. Arnold Hewitt has sent a full description of an immature Long-tailed Duck (Clangula hyemalis) seen by himself and several other observers at Meaford Power Station, near Stone, Staffs, on October 30th and November 5th, 1949. The bird was on a pool used for sludging boiler ash, which has been constructed within the last two years. There are 3 previous records for the county.