

## NOTES.

## COITION OF ROOK ON THE GROUND.

ON March 23rd, 1947, I observed a presumed male Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) attempting coition on the ground with a presumed female of the same species. The rookery was about 50 yards away.

P. PLACE.

ON April 4th, 1949, at Little Plumstead, Norfolk, two Rooks were present in a meadow. The male approached the other with its wings extended and pointed downwards, the tail spread and head lowered. The female responded by maintaining a spread position, though not so exaggerated as the male's. The male moved round her and mounted, coition lasting only several seconds, and then both flew off and continued feeding.

R. G. PETTITT.

[A further case of coition on the ground has been reported to us by Mr. K. G. Spencer, who saw it on March 18th, 1950, a quarter of a mile from the nearest rookery; there is also a record in the *Report of the Reading Ornithological Club*, 1949, p. 7, and we have ourselves observed it at least half a mile from the rookery. These and a previous record (*antea*, vol. xxxviii, p. 133) suggest that coition on the ground at a distance from the rookery may be more frequent than is indicated by the statement in *The Handbook* (vol. v, Additions and Corrections, p. 256).—Eds.].

## RUBBER IN CASTINGS OF ROOKS AND MAGPIE.

THE notes (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 52; xliii, p. 31) on rubber in the castings of Rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*) and Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) remind me that in the winters of 1939-40 and 1940-41 my friend Mr. R. Butler-Stoney made a large collection of pellets in a Rook roost at Frensham, Surrey. I have a photograph of this collection, which shows that there is a majority of rubber bands among the various pieces; a large blue one is three inches in length and five smaller bands, all taken from one pellet, were of blue-green colour. Also in the collection were part of the inside of a golf ball, a cycle-tyre puncture patch, thin rubber sheet and a blue label marked "Made in England." The pieces were of a variety of colours, blue, green, red, orange and white, in that order of frequency. The stones in these pellets (over 100 were examined) were found to consist of brick, chalk and other materials in the ratio of 1 : 2 : 7 respectively, thus supporting the late B. W. Tucker's observation (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 53) that red is not necessarily a particularly dominant colour. 537 sizeable stones were found in 100 pellets.

Mr. Butler-Stoney has shown me a piece of a broken rubber band, two and a quarter inches in length, which he found in the casting of a Magpie (*Pica pica*) at Eashing, Surrey, in February, 1941. It would be interesting to know if there are other records of rubber being eaten by Magpies. It would seem justifiable to assert that rubber is eaten by most of the *Corvidae*.

D. H. TRAPNELL.

[Mr. Trapnell has shown us the photograph mentioned in his note, but it was unfortunately not suitable for reproduction in *British Birds*.—EDS.].

#### CHIRRUPING NOTE OF JAY.

IN his notes (*antea*, vol. xlii, pp. 278-287) on the Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) Derek Goodwin mentions the "chirruping" note as heard by him only in tame birds. In April, 1949, on a thick, foggy day, I passed a small ivy-covered tree and heard soft twittering and warbling notes coming from it. They resembled those of the Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*). When I investigated a Jay flew out. Exactly the same thing happened the next day, the fog still persisting, which enabled me to get very near. Such sounds coming from so noisy a bird as the Jay prompted me to make a note of it. The sound would not have carried more than a few yards, even without the fog.

M. J. DAWSON.

[We have submitted this note to Mr. Goodwin who is of opinion that the notes heard by Mr. Dawson were probably a form of sub-song "uttered when the bird is alone and apparently at ease."—EDS.].

#### SONG- AND DISLAY-FLIGHTS IN THE LINNET.

REFERENCE has already been made in these pages (*antea*, vol. xl, p. 49; vol. xli, p. 343) to actual or possible song-flights in the Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*). That these flights are commoner than might be supposed is suggested by a number of observations made by us in north Norfolk during 1950. On the first occasion, on March 25th, on Salthouse Heath, a Linnet left a tree-top and while singing in the air in the usual way suddenly executed a special movement, with its wings downstretched, rather in the manner of a Redshank's song-flight, but without the latter's wing-vibrations. There was no doubt about its being a special attitude, and not a casual one, for the song ceased as soon as the attitude was discontinued. The following day we saw two birds on the edge of Cley Marsh execute exactly the same movement, and one of us (R.A.R.) witnessed it at least a dozen times during the season. On each occasion other Linnets of undetermined sex were present, and twice these were ascertained to be females.

R. S. R. FITTER AND R. A. RICHARDSON.

ON May 6th, 1950, I was watching a cock Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*) singing on a telegraph wire at Highclere, N. Hampshire, when a hen flew onto the wire near by. Immediately both birds flew off, and as the hen flew low over a field the cock appeared to be chasing it, flying slightly above and behind, with a peculiar erratic flight, and with an even more undulating and wavering action than is normal in this species. The tail was noticeably depressed, and at intervals the bird would pause and hover with vibrating wings, depressing the tail still further, before starting once more in pursuit of the hen. The latter finally flew into some

bushes, where the cock followed it and the birds were lost to sight.

*The Handbook* does not mention any display flight in this species, and descriptions of display flights of the Linnet by L. Rendell and R. S. R. Fitter (*antea*, vol. xl, p. 49, and vol. xli, p. 343 respectively) are somewhat different from the observation recorded above.

M. SUMMERS-SMITH.

#### CHAFFINCH NESTING ON GROUND.

ON June 15th, 1950, my wife and I were walking along the bank of a stream in Rutland, when a hen Chaffinch (*Fringilla cœlebs*) suddenly rose out of the grass at our feet. Upon investigation we discovered the nest, containing five eggs on the point of hatching, on the ground in the long grass on the sloping bank of the stream.

*The Handbook* makes no specific mention of this species nesting on the ground.

E. L. ROBERTS.

#### CALLING HABIT OF BRAMBLING.

IN June, 1947, many Bramblings (*Fringilla montifringilla*) were observed during a stay of several days in a pine forest in Norway, at 3,000 ft., between 60° and 61°N. My attention was usually attracted by the male's loud and plaintive "dwee" call, and the bird was nearly always found to be perched on the extreme tip of a pine tree. This rather striking habit is not mentioned in *The Handbook*.

W. L. ROSEVEARE.

#### BRAMBLING SUMMERING IN LINCOLNSHIRE.

ON May 31st, 1950, I was surprised to see a male Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) in the woods at Great Limber, Lincolnshire. I had an excellent view of the bird as it perched on the top branch of an oak, where it called persistently, throwing its head back as it did so. The note was very much like the prolonged "dwee" call of the Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*). During the next four days the bird called regularly in this way, its favourite perches being dead twigs at the tops of two diseased elms.

On June 5th I found that it had moved to another area about a quarter of a mile away, where I soon realized that it was interested in a pair of Chaffinches (*F. cœlebs*) which were building in an elm. On several occasions on this and the next two days fierce fights took place between the Brambling and the male Chaffinch; on June 7th they fluttered almost to the ground, locked together, within arm's length of me. On June 5th I saw what appeared to be a display flight when the Brambling flew towards the female Chaffinch with shivering wing-beats reminiscent of the song-flight of the Wood-Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*). On June 9th I saw the bird about 100 yards away attacking another male Chaffinch, but on June 10th it was back in the area of the first pair. It seemed gradually to lose interest in the Chaffinches, but remained in the area calling persistently; I last heard it on July 5th, after which I lost sight of it. I heard a Brambling's flight call on August 4th and saw a bird with a party of Chaffinches less than half a mile

from where I first saw it ; I feel fairly certain that this must have been the same individual. REG. C. MAY.

#### DISPLAY OF CORN-BUNTING.

ON March 28th, 1949, I watched a display, differing in some particulars from that described in *The Handbook*, by two birds amongst a party of ten Corn-Buntings (*Emberiza calandra*) sitting on telegraph wires.

One male was singing at the rate of 16-18 times per minute, with a maximum rate of occasionally about 20 times, compared with the normal rate of 6-8 times a minute. At intervals it indulged in wing-lifting to the maximum extent, followed by stretching out its wings slightly, together or alternately, shivering or fluttering them sometimes ; at intervals the tail was fanned out on alternate sides or just spread out. Song continued the whole time at an intensive rate, the longest break between any songs being 4 secs., while usually it was about, or less than, 1 second.

One of the other birds, presumably a female, appeared to be taking a great deal of interest in this display, and was generally within about six inches of the male. On two or three occasions " she " flew up and hovered in various positions either just above or below, or sometimes to the side of the male, and always alighted near him. Whenever this occurred the male was more excited than usual, singing at the greatest rate and shivering his wings.

One other male was in occasional and half-hearted song at some distance from the rest of the party. The remaining seven birds appeared to be taking no interest in the matter. A. E. VINE.

#### YELLOWHAMMER SINGING IN FLIGHT.

ON July 19th, 1949, at 19.30 I was walking down a lane in West Suffolk, when a Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) which had been singing from a sapling in the hedge flew up at my approach and settled on another twig near by, singing as it flew, so that the greater part of the song was delivered in flight. As I continued to approach, the Yellowhammer flew up and eventually settled on a more distant perch, again singing as it did so, but this time the whole song was delivered whilst the bird was flying.

*The Handbook* does not mention this species singing in flight, though this habit has been recorded in the Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) by Mr. R. G. Adams (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 385).

JOHN DENNY.

#### SNOW-BUNTING IN WARWICKSHIRE.

ON November 1st, 1949, at the Earlswood Reservoirs, Warwickshire, we had under observation for an hour or more a Snow-Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*). It was a juvenile male in winter plumage and had been seen, but not identified, on October 27th ; it was not seen after November 1st.

We watched it feeding on the lake-edge on Bur-Marigold (*Bidens tripartita*), the seeds of which it ate straight off the plant as well as on the ground, and on Duck-weed (*Lemna* sp.) which had been

washed up by high winds. House-Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) were also feeding on the latter plant.

This appears to be the fourth record of the Snow-Bunting for Warwickshire.  
J. M. ARNOTT AND M. J. THOMAS.

#### ROBBERY OF NEST MATERIAL BY HOUSE-SPARROW.

THE report (*antea*, vol. xliii, p. 186) of the theft by a Blue Tit (*Parus cæruleus*) of nesting material belonging to a Willow-Tit (*P. atricapillus*) reminds me that in April, 1914, I watched House-Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) completely pull to pieces and incorporate in their own nest the nest of a Mistle-Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) in a cherry tree. In the same month the newly-built nest of a Song-Thrush (*T. ericetorum*) in an arbor vitæ gradually and entirely disappeared, apparently by the same agency.  
C. SUFFERN.

#### DISPLAY OF HOUSE-SPARROW.

THE following account of the display of the House-Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) is based on observations made at Port Fouad, Egypt, on May 20th, 1949. The display, which lasted for fully four minutes, was characterized by its rapt and rigid nature, and was thus quite distinct from the normal, more noisy and volatile posturings of one or several males. There were two components :—

(1) The male hopped round the female in a squat position with neck contracted, bill pointing upwards at 40 degrees, wings closed but slightly lowered, head, body and tail almost on the same level, and legs bent, bringing the body parallel with the ground. The movement was accompanied by a subdued chirping and a shivering of the wings through a narrow arc as if a nervous current were pulsating through them. The actions were those of a mechanical toy.

(2) Several times during the last minute or so of this display the male interrupted it with a remarkable posture which suggested an ecstatic state. It would suddenly drop back on its tail so as to be approximately 45 degrees to the ground, then straighten its legs, and with wings quivering raise itself to a fully vertical position by a series of regular jerks—a trembling motion—at the same time elongating its neck and pointing its bill directly upwards. It would sway there for a few seconds before performing the first display agam. At the height of this posture the bird appeared as if it were supported on the wing tips.

All the while the female seemed to be feeding and once or twice half-heartedly pecked in the male's direction; however, it had approached the male in the first place. While (2) was always executed facing the female, (1) was performed often in other directions. Other males were driven away during the display, though tolerated before.  
K. E. L. SIMMONS.

#### WOOD-LARKS IN YORKSHIRE.

ON October 31st, 1949, three Wood-Larks (*Lullula arborea*) were seen on a ploughed field near Scarborough, by H. P. They were still present the following day, and were watched for some time by E.A.W. and A.J.W. The lighter colouring and prominent light

eye-stripe were clearly seen, and the short tail was noticeable whilst the birds were on the ground as well as in the air. They had moved on the next morning. This record is of interest in that it is the first occurrence of this species in the Scarborough district to be recorded in the official records.

H. PEASE, E. A. WALLIS AND A. J. WALLIS.

[Wood-Larks were reported (*antea*, vol. xxxix, pp. 85-86) breeding in N. Yorks in 1945, apparently for the first time. Since that date further records have come in and in 1949 (*Y.N.U., Committee for Ornithology Report* for 1949, p. 8) "at least four pairs bred, and more were suspected." Mr. Ralph Chislett informs us (*in litt.*) that though the recent records indicate an increase of the species in Yorkshire it is possible that birds were previously overlooked.—EDS.].

#### DISPLAY OF GREY WAGTAIL.

At 8.00 on May 30th, 1949, a pair of Grey Wagtails (*Motacilla cinerea*) settled on the bank of the R. Elan near Rhayader, Radnorshire. The male immediately adopted a peculiar attitude, in which the yellow rump feathers were erected until they were almost vertical, forming a considerable hump in this region; the tail was depressed to the ground and slightly expanded; the wings were also depressed and vibrated rapidly; the neck was held straight and upright. Maintaining this position the male ran towards the female and some "tizzi" calls were heard; the female drove him off, but he immediately advanced again and was again driven off. After being similarly repulsed for the third time, the male stopped displaying and both birds flew off. This posture differs somewhat from that described in *The Handbook*. G. BEVEN.

#### AGGRESSIVE DISPLAY OF BLUE TIT.

ON January 21st, 1949, at Birkenhead, a Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) was pecking crumbs near a Potter trap, when a Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*) flew down, hovered over the trap and alighted on top of it. It examined the food inside and then flew down to the ground in front of the Robin about six inches away from it and displayed. The tail was fanned and slightly depressed, and the breast pressed close to the ground. The bill was then opened wide and the head swayed from side to side for a few seconds. During this display the Robin remained quite still, but showed no other response. The Blue Tit then hopped round the trap and eventually faced the Robin again; the display was repeated but was of shorter duration.

W. T. C. RANKIN.

[An aggressive display, differing in some details from the above, has been recorded (*antea*, vol. xxxix, p. 86) as used by a Blue Tit against a Great Tit (*Parus major*). Other cases of inter-specific display of this kind have been recorded by Colquhoun (*antea*, vol. xxxv, pp. 234-240).—EDS.].

#### CLOACA-PECKING BY BLUE TIT.

WITH reference to notes which have appeared from time to time,

concerning cloaca-pecking by various species, it may be of interest to note an instance of this behaviour by Blue Tits (*Parus cæruleus*). On April 24th, 1950, a pair were seen to mate high up in a fir tree. After coition, the female remained crouching with shivering wings and the male hopped round behind her and pecked at the cloaca, several times, although in a much less violent manner than is usual with the Hedge-Sparrow (*Prunella modularis*). GEOFFREY BOYLE.

#### GAIT OF BEARDED TIT.

As there is no record in *The Handbook* of the Bearded Tit (*Panurus biarmicus*) walking or running, it may be of interest to record that on May 31st, 1950, we observed an adult male of this species walking and running about on a small patch of mud at the edge of a reed-fringed pool in a Suffolk marsh. It pecked at the mud, walking and running with considerable speed, immediately bringing to mind the actions of shore waders, with its tail cocked up at angle of about 60° from the horizontal.

Juvenile birds had been seen in the vicinity of this site the previous day; after continuing this activity for approximately three minutes, the bird ran back into the reeds towards the area where these juveniles had been seen. No food was visible in its bill, however.

G. B. G. BENSON AND P. R. WESTALL.

#### TRAPPED MASKED SHRIKE "FEIGNING DISABLEMENT."

THE recent notes (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 216; xliii, p. 252) on various species of birds "feigning death" when trapped prompt this record of related behaviour from a Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*). This bird, a migrant juvenile, was caught in a Heligoland type trap on October 9th, 1949, at the Fayid Bird Observatory, Egypt. While still in the collecting chamber, the shrike slipped about as though injured, finally lying on its side with one wing extended, but, before it was transferred to a portable carrying-box, it "recovered," fluttering before the glass wall in the usual manner of a trapped bird. When put in the carrying-box, the Shrike lay quite inert on one side, with its head extended and eyes open, and the legs drawn up to the belly, feet clenched. It remained thus while being transported some hundred yards, but when handled it "came to life," struggled, and emitted a rattling scream, hopping about vigorously and flapping its wings in a normal "healthy" manner when returned to the box.

K. E. L. SIMMONS, H. G. BROWNLOW, J. W. GODECK.

#### GOLDCREST USING SAME NEST TWICE IN ONE SEASON.

ON August 14th, 1949, I watched a pair of Goldcrests (*Regulus regulus*) feeding young in a nest in a Yew (*Taxus baccata*) at Damerham, Hants., which I had seen being built in April and which was occupied towards the end of that month. I watched the birds often until August 18th, and on the 20th saw the young being fed out of the nest. By this time the nest was looking very ragged.

G. W. H. MOULE.

### “ANTING” OF SONG-THRUSH.

ON June 15th, 1949, at Strawberry Hill, Middlesex, I watched a Song-Thrush (*Turdus ericetorum*) squatting on the ground and picking up objects which it placed among its primaries and secondaries. This went on for ten minutes and on investigation I found that the bird had been sitting in an ants' nest. Since “anting” in this species seems to have been recorded only once before (*antea*, vol. xl, p. 117) I thought that this further instance might be of interest.

T. P. WELLS.

As there are few records of “anting” by the Song-Thrush (*Turdus ericetorum*), it may be worth while putting on record that while we were watching a party of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) “anting” in a stone courtyard at Burford, Oxfordshire, on July 21st, 1950, an adult Song-Thrush in full moult was seen to do the same. The courtyard was swarming with ants, and the Starlings were vigorously engaged in picking them up and rubbing them on their plumage, especially under the wings—the juveniles present were only seen to pick the ants up. At the same time the thrush was picking ants up, rubbing them on its plumage, and shuffling around among them.

R. S. R. FITTER AND R. A. RICHARDSON.

### DISPLAY OF BLACKBIRD.

ON December 27th, 1949, at Aveton Gifford, South Devon, I watched a male Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) displaying to a hen. The hen flew across a meadow and perched in a small elm tree; the male followed and perched about four feet from the hen and slightly below her. The male faced the hen, then, crouching low over the branch, tail held horizontal and wings slightly extended, turned, ran along the branch for about three feet, turned and ran back to its original position. It then flew to the same branch as the female, perching about a foot from her and facing in the same direction. After a pause the male returned to its first branch and repeated the display, ending on the same branch as the female. After another pause it began the process all over again, making several runs along its branch, but this time it flew to a branch above the hen where it preened for a few seconds before once more dropping to the lower branch. It did three more runs, flew to the side of the hen, then back on to its branch for two more runs and finally flew higher up into the tree. The hen then flew off followed by the male.

During the whole of this display the hen took no notice whatever of the male. It was noticed that the male maintained the crouching position during the runs and at the end of each run always turned towards the hen. The day was mild with a light southerly wind blowing.

D. R. EDGCOMBE.

ON March 21st, 1950, a male and female Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) were seen alighting on a wall about five feet apart and facing one another. Immediately they ran together, the male advancing

faster than the female and with his wings half-spread, held somewhat below the horizontal. He opened and half-closed his mandibles as he ran. The female ran a few steps with her beak slightly open and pointed upwards at an angle of 60°. At their nearest approach the birds' beaks were about four or five inches apart and the cock then opened and half-closed his mandibles rapidly and vehemently with neck outstretched thrusting towards the female. She opened her beak and once or twice moved her mandibles without closing them with her head still in the air. Then she took flight and he remained for a second or two with wings somewhat drooped, shuffling his plumage slightly. Then he also flew. Two male Blackbirds had been seen repeatedly in this territory, flying up and sparring in the usual fashion. The posturing described took place where this territory adjoined an area inhabited for three seasons by a ringed female. The female was found nest-building later in the same day. E. A. ARMSTRONG AND E. J. ARMSTRONG.

[In several recent volumes we have published accounts of displays of the Blackbird, but none that agrees very closely with either of the displays recorded above. The nearest approach to the one recorded by Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong is to be found in a note by H. E. Littledale (*antea*, vol. xxxviii, p. 38). As was recorded on another occasion (*antea*, vol. xxxvii, p. 215) it is evident that "the display actions of the Blackbird show wide variation and conform to no well-defined pattern."—Eds.]

#### BEHAVIOUR OF ROBIN IN PRESENCE OF ADDER.

WHILE passing through a wood on Leith Hill, Surrey, on July 3rd, 1949, I was attracted by an adult Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) which was remarkably agitated. Its beak was full of small green caterpillars and it was fluttering backwards and forwards in front of its nest in a low bank. It would perch on the bushes near by, continually cocking up its tail in a most exaggerated manner. The whole time it was uttering loud, harsh, rattling notes, quite unlike any I had previously heard. Repeatedly it would flutter just in front of its nest and hover about two feet from it for a few moments and then go back to perch and repeat its alarm. On investigation, the four nearly fully-fledged young were found pulled a few inches out in front of the nest, and there was an Adder (about a foot long) among them. The Adder immediately shot into the hole in the bank and coiled up in the now empty nest there. After chasing off the snake, I found that two of the young Robins were dead and two were apparently dying. I put the two latter back in the nest, hid the dead ones and retired to watch. The adult Robin soon came back and paid several visits to the nest and became immediately very quiet, only giving a few soft "tick" notes, and one faint phrase of song. It then left but returned again in a few minutes, but thereafter no adults were seen carrying food. It would appear, therefore, that as soon as the young had ceased to beg for food, the adults ceased to collect it. By this time the two young Robins in the nest were immobile. Two adults were not seen together so I was not sure whether both were present.

G. BEVEN.

## ALPINE SWIFT IN DORSET.

ON May 22nd, 1950, at 14.00, my wife and I saw an Alpine Swift (*Apus melba*) at Swanage. It flew and circled around, in brilliant sunshine, with about a dozen other Swifts (*Apus apus*) for ten minutes. The white belly first attracted attention, but the paler brown upper parts were almost as striking when seen at close range, as were the conspicuous white chin and brown breast-band. The larger size, however, though obvious enough when the two species flew side by side, or the rarer bird came close to us, was often masked when the birds spread over a large area of the sky, for then their apparent size varied according to their distance, so that the Alpine Swift was lost in the crowd. G. BERNARD GOOCH.

## ROOSTING OF HOOPOES.

THE *Handbook* records that Hoopoes (*Upopa epops*) occasionally climb up trees like a woodpecker. In the springs of 1949 and 1950, we saw Hoopoes at Fayid, Egypt, roosting in young banana trees not exceeding ten feet in height. They cling to the trunk in a woodpecker-like attitude at a height of four to six feet from the ground at the junction of the down-hanging dead leaves and the new growth. The prevailing wind is northerly. All Hoopoes seen roosting in this way were on the southern side of the tree.

R. W. CROWE AND H. G. BROWNLOW.

## STATUS OF GREEN WOODPECKER IN NORTHERN ENGLAND.

THE publication (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 186) of a note on the increase and spread of the Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) in Lancashire resulted in the receipt of several notes suggesting that a similar increase was taking place further north. As the publication of notes from individual observers might have given a confused or partial picture, we have instead secured reports covering the whole of Northumberland and Durham and Lakeland. We are very grateful to Messrs. G. W. Temperley and Ernest Blezard for these summaries of the present status of the species in their respective areas.

THE EDITORS.

## NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM.

THE status of the Green Woodpecker has changed considerably during recorded times. Until the early years of last century it seems to have been fairly common and well distributed in both counties. Selby (1831) wrote: "The Green Woodpecker is seldom seen in the northern parts of Northumberland. I have, however, met with it in the woods about Hulin Abbey, near Alnwick, and upon the banks of the Wansbeck. It is common about Durham and indeed in all localities where timber abounds and has attained an advanced age." The first observer to record any falling off in numbers was Hutchinson (1840), who wrote that it was "formerly much more common than it is at present; the cause being apparently the scarcity of decaying trees and the persecution which every bird considered somewhat rare encounters at the present day. . . . They

are occasionally met with near Durham, but I have never found a nest." Subsequent writers described it as: "a rare bird" or "an occasional visitor." Hancock (1874) wrote: "not by any means common; occasionally breeds in the district"; but he quoted only one instance of breeding—at Minsteracres in the valley of the Tyne, date not recorded.

At the beginning of the present century, Tristram (1905) gave its status as—"formerly common, now rare." A few years after this was written, however, observers noted an increase in numbers in the few localities where it had previously been located, and a slow but gradual extension of its range followed. In 1913 it was slowly moving up the Tees valley. By 1920 it had become established in some of the larger woodlands in Weardale and was spreading from them both up and down that valley. By 1927 it was in the valleys of the Derwent and Team and breeding in woods along the middle reaches of the Tyne. While this extension over the County of Durham was in progress, reports were received of its more frequent occurrence in woods about Morpeth and Alnwick in Northumberland; but here the most rapid increase took place from 1940 onwards. In 1941 it was reported to be within 10 miles of Berwick in the north and by 1943 it had reached Falstone on the North Tyne. By 1949 it was breeding in most of the deciduous woodlands in the two counties, from the coast to the fringes of the western moorlands and its laughing notes are a familiar sound to the country-lover.

The same period has also witnessed a most decided increase and an extension of range of the Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*). It never became as scarce as the Green Woodpecker and its recovery began rather earlier and was more gradual. In numbers it has kept ahead of the Green Woodpecker and is now a very common woodland species. In the Gosforth Park Bird Sanctuary at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in 1949, seven pairs were counted and the nesting holes of three of them were located. It has been able to penetrate further up the river valleys than the Green Woodpecker as its favourite nesting site is in the trunks of decaying birches (*Betula alba*) which extend along the banks of the streams beyond the limits of the woodlands.

Like many other resident species, the woodpeckers suffered severely during the winter of 1946-47, but recent reports establish the fact that in most districts both species are regaining their previous strength.

It is difficult to account for this gradual increase in numbers or for the rapid spread that has occurred during the last decade. It cannot be a question of available nesting-sites, as there has always been an ample supply of deciduous trees in both counties. On the coal-fields of Eastern and Central Durham and of South-East Northumberland there are many well wooded parks and game-covers where the trees have been allowed to grow, until time, aided by colliery smoke and chemical fumes, has reduced them to a decrepit old age, when insect and other pests provide food for birds

and decay makes nesting-sites available for hole-breeding species. Of late years many of these woodlands have been cleared to make room for plantations of conifers, in which the trees are felled for timber long before they attain old age. This will continue at an increased rate in the future and promises to have a serious effect upon the avifauna of both counties.

The Green Woodpecker is much more of a ground feeder than the other species and one of its favourite foods here is the Wood Ant (*Formica rufa*). The widespread planting of coniferous trees has been advantageous to this ant, which, in the writer's experience, was never more plentiful than it is to-day. It is possible that this more abundant food supply may have been one of the factors promoting the increase of the Green Woodpecker.

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GEORGE W. TEMPERLEY.

## LAKELAND.

ALTHOUGH the Green Woodpecker had nested in Cumberland so long ago as 1840 and been settled at Bassenthwaite since 1905, it first gained any prominence as a Lakeland bird in Westmorland. Perhaps no later than at Bassenthwaite, it arrived in the south-east of that county to become three or four pairs strong near Kirkby Lonsdale alone. Then, following upon the arrival of a pair at Rydal in 1918, the Grasmere valley became the stronger populated place. Eastward again, in the Eden valley, there were settlers on either side of the boundary between the sister counties. Two of four distinct localities in North Lancashire were suspected nesting haunts.

This, broadly, brings the history to 1942 and the beginning of a marked spread which developed in an extraordinary way from 1947 onward. A northward advance ran along the east side of Cumberland, particularly in the Eden valley, and continued north-easterly into the valley of the Gelt. The bird had reached Gilsland, at the Northumberland boundary, by 1945. Around Carlisle it is now likely to be encountered in almost every direction for a dozen miles or more while, in April, 1950, a couple actually turned up in the city.

Wooded parts of Westmorland have been occupied along the Kent valley from about the estuary up into Kentmere. North of this place, the bird has taken to Ullswater side. It has got into the Winster valley and, nearer its early stronghold, spread into Langdale, and around Ambleside and along the east side of Windermere.

To one part of High Furness, it certainly arrived with some suddenness in 1948. It can now be traced from Graythwaite, at the west side of Windermere, up by Esthwaite to Yewdale and Tilberthwaite and, round by Tarn Hows and Coniston, to Nibthwaite at the foot of Coniston Water. Near Grange-over-Sands, one of the earlier North Lancashire haunts in Cartmel, there are now at least two occupied woods. Except for the Duddon valley, between Furness and Cumberland, records are lacking for the western or seaward side of Lakeland.

The details are from those supplied to the Carlisle Natural History Society by members and correspondents, ERNEST BLEZARD,

#### ABNORMAL CLUTCH OF MERLIN'S EGGS.

ON May 29th and 31st, 1950, in the wild hill-country of south-east Cardiganshire, Wales, I had the pleasure of examining *in situ* a splendid clutch of seven eggs of the Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). They were laid in an old nest of the Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) built near the top of a thorn-tree on a steep hillside at a height of about 15 feet. All the eggs were very similar and appeared to have been laid by the same bird, and their arrangement in the nest was rather interesting. Three lay in a line, the remaining four being disposed in pairs on either side of the line. So far as my experience extends of this species in Wales, three to five, but usually four, eggs comprise the normal laying. *The Handbook* remarks that sets of seven have been recorded only from the continent. HUBERT E. POUNDS.

#### AUTUMN BEHAVIOUR OF KESTRELS.

A RECENT note by Mr. K. G. Spencer (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 390) on this subject reminded me of a similar but more complex display which I witnessed on September 26th, 1946, in hilly country east of Burnley, Lancs.

Three Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) were hovering close together over a steep hillside which is a favourite hunting ground of this species. One of them, which was either female or immature, took no part in the display. The other two were a pair, and since the weather was bright and sunny I was easily able to distinguish the sexes.

When I first saw them the pair were hovering close together and from time to time the cock stooped at the hen, narrowly missing her, and then glided backwards and forwards below her like a pendulum bob attached to her by some unseen cord. He would finish this display with an earthward rush, similar to the spring display of the Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), before returning to her side to repeat the performance.

After some minutes the hen came to rest on a small hawthorn tree and the cock began to fly round her passing quite close to her. He could be clearly seen to be holding something in one foot (he had been to the ground just before this), and one of the birds, probably the cock, called frequently. The call was similar to the usual "kee-kee-kee" but softer and lower pitched. Eventually the hen left her perch and both birds hovered close together, the

cock still carrying the object. After some time he dropped it and I could see that it was a light object, probably a piece of stick, for it dropped obliquely, with the wind. He immediately flew down, picked it up again and resumed his position near the hen who was still hovering. He then dropped it a second time and left it.

At intervals during the hovering the cock would fly a few hundred yards into the wind (south-west) and then turn round, rushing back towards the hen, with the wind, wings almost closed. (cf. J. S. Huxley's observations; *Handbook*, vol. III, p. 27.) The two birds eventually drifted away with the wind until they were lost to sight over the brow of the hill.

On September 10th, 1948, in exactly the same place I saw five Kestrels hovering close together and chasing each other around and between some small hawthorn trees which grow on the hillside. This time I was unable to pick out a mature male and I am of the opinion that all the birds were immature, although I did not get a sufficiently good view of them to place this beyond doubt.

On one occasion since 1946, namely on September 15th, 1948, I have seen a Kestrel stoop on and pick up an inanimate object. This time, however, the bird was apparently alone and only rose a distance of some four to six feet before dropping the object which was a small, dried up tuft of grass. The bird had probably seen this moving in the wind and stooped on it in mistake for some living prey. A few minutes later this same bird caught a Short-tailed Field Vole (*Microtus agrestis*) and carried it away to an outstanding knoll about a quarter of a mile away. Here it deposited the body, walked round for a few minutes without making any attack on the vole and then flew off. I examined the vole and found it almost undamaged. As far as I could see, the bird was not disturbed in any way before it could eat its prey. The vole was not there on the following morning. I have not seen any previous record of a Kestrel catching prey outside the breeding season and not eating it.

D. LEAVER.

#### SHOVELER BREEDING IN MIDDLESEX.

FURTHER to my note on the first recorded breeding of Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) in Middlesex (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 330), I can again report the successful breeding of this species in Middlesex for 1949 and 1950. The breeding locality for the 1949 record was the same as that recorded for 1948, and the 1950 record approximately one mile away to the south-west of the original area.

On both occasions I was accompanied by W. N. Mitchell.

On June 6th, 1949, an adult female was brooding 8-9 downy young in the long grass on a sloping bank and she was almost trodden upon. "Injury-feigning" was given immediately; with wings spread out the bird flapped laboriously along the ground until, about 15 yards away, it stopped—with breast still touching the ground—and turned its head towards us; after a little while it stood up facing us, then flying low towards us settled on the bank about 10 yards away.

During the display the pale blue wing coverts were seen well, also white wing bar, greenish speculum, and characteristic bill, brownish in colour with base and edges orange. Simultaneously with the flushing of the adult some of the young tumbled down the bank, and in the commotion one young tumbled upon its back and could not get away until picked up and released.

On June 18th, 1950, we were able to watch a pair of adult Shovelers with eight downy young. All identification details of the adults were plainly seen. C. A. WHITE.

#### RED-CRESTED POCHARDS IN SUFFOLK AND NORTHUMBERLAND.

ON February 18th, 1950, I observed a duck Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) on Easton Broad, Suffolk.

When first seen, it was with four Common Pochards (*Aythya ferina*), a duck Smew (*Mergus albellus*), a duck Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), and a drake Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) in a small party together.

The main field characteristics were easily seen with binoculars and telescope, including the well defined grey cheek patch, the dark bill with reddish tip; and the white wing patch, in particular, was well seen, when the bird was flushed.

It should, perhaps, be mentioned that I have previously become familiar with this species in the Camargue, S. France.

P. R. WESTALL.

FOLLOWING the occurrence of Red-crested Pochards (*Netta rufina*) in Cheshire and Nottinghamshire (*antea*, vol. xliii, p. 20) it may be of interest to record that on February 11th, 1950, a duck of this species was seen on the lake in the Gosforth Park Bird Sanctuary, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It was observed under very favourable conditions by three members of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. All the distinguishing characters of the species were noted.

The lake has been re-visited subsequently but the bird has not been seen again. R. G. GREY, K. N. GREEN AND W. R. LOFTHOUSE.

[Mr. G. W. Temperley, who has forwarded the above record to us, informs us that he is satisfied that the bird was correctly identified. In connexion with these records and those for 1949, we are informed by Mr. C. A. Norris that a possible source of escapes has come to light near Birmingham, where there are, apparently, quite a number of full-winged birds. The possibility of these birds being escapes cannot be altogether discounted.—EDS.]

#### COMMON SCOTER DIVING DIRECT FROM FLIGHT.

WHILST watching from a hide on Little Hilbre Island, Dee Estuary, Cheshire, on April 5th, 1950, I noticed a duck Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) flying rapidly down towards the water, chased by two immature Herring-Gulls (*Larus argentatus*). The duck dived straight under the water without first alighting, and only reappeared

for a brief instant some quarter of a minute later, when it dived again in the normal fashion as a gull approached. When it surfaced the second time it remained above water for a good while, but a third approach by a gull made it dive again. After this it was not seen to be molested again.

I find no record of this action in *The Handbook*.

W. T. C. RANKIN.

#### VELVET SCOTER IN SOMERSET.

As the Velvet Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) has been recorded in Somerset on very few occasions since 1900, and is also rare on inland waters, it may be worth recording that I had a fairly good view of one at Durleigh reservoir on November 7th, 1949. When seen in flight it appeared uniformly sooty black, with a very conspicuous white wing patch, and was no doubt a male. It was also present on November 12th.

E. G. RICHARDS.

#### BLACK-THROATED DIVERS IN WARWICKSHIRE, WORCESTERSHIRE AND BERKSHIRE.

ON February 5th, 1950, a single Black-throated Diver (*Colymbus arcticus*) was seen by J.S. at Earlswood Lakes, Warwickshire, and shortly afterwards by A.W.C., P.E. and others. It was not seen on or after February 18th. It was smaller than a typical Great Northern Diver (*Colymbus immer*) both in overall length and bill size. The head and back of neck were grey-brown and of very smooth texture. The throat and neck were white except for a small dusky patch under the chin, and small patches at the sides of the base of the neck. The back was black-brown with several rows of white spots, mainly on the scapulars. It was seen under varying light conditions at ranges down to ten yards. At this range it was seen that the lower mandible was very slightly down-curved.

This is the third record of the species in Warwickshire.

On February 12th, 1950, another Black-throated Diver was seen at Upper Bittell Reservoir, Worcestershire: it was still present on February 18th, but had left by the 25th. In appearance it was very similar to the Earlswood specimen (which was still present) and although possibly a trifle larger, the slender neck was very noticeable. This is the first Worcestershire record.

It may be added that the appearance of these birds coincided with a period of south-westerly gales.

A. W. CUNDALL, P. EVANS, J. SEARS.

At dusk on February 3rd, 1950, a bird having an unusual silhouette was observed on the lake in Whiteknights Park, Reading. Further observation the following morning showed that it was a Black-throated Diver (*Colymbus arcticus*). The bird was in full plumage apart from a white chin and a few white feathers in the centre of the black throat.

Many local ornithologists were able to observe this unusual species in great detail as it was extremely tame and frequently

surfaced within five yards of a busy public road ; the lake is within the County Borough boundary. Several observers saw the bird flap its wings and were of the opinion that the flight feathers of the right wing were truncated. However, the diver was seen flying on February 24th and it was not reported after April 4th.

C. C. BALCH.

#### BAR-TAILED GODWIT SWIMMING.

As attention has been drawn (*antea*, vol. xliii, p. 30) to the fact that *The Handbook* makes no mention of Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) swimming, the following incident may be worth recording. On September 12th, 1949, I was watching a party of twelve Greenshanks (*Tringa nebularia*) and one Green Sandpiper (*T. ochropus*) resting and feeding by a shallow pool on Rockcliffe Marsh, Cumberland, when a Bar-tailed Godwit joined them and began wading in the shallows, then presently got into deeper water and swam about for a good five minutes, picking insects off the water with its bill. A sudden alarm disturbed the Greenshanks and the Godwit also flew away.

R. H. BROWN.

#### TEMMINCK'S STINT IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE IN MARCH.

A VERY small wader in the company of a party of Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) was observed at the sewage farm, Cambridge, on March 17th, 1950. We approached within 50 yards of the bird, one observer using Ross  $\times 6$  and the other  $\times 8$  binoculars and each watcher examined the bird with the aid of a  $\times 40$  telescope.

Careful comparison with Redshank suggested an approximate length of 5-6 inches and the bird was of such a height as to be able to pass between a Redshank's legs. The upper parts were grey, streaked with darker markings ; the under parts pure white except for the upper breast which was finely streaked grey-buff, this area ending with a fairly sharp line of demarcation. There was a light superciliary stripe and the forehead was white. The tail of the bird at rest was seen through the telescope to be narrowly edged white, while the rest of the tail was dark brown. The bill was short, straight and black and the legs very dark (possibly muddy !).

Careful consideration of our field notes suggests that the bird was a Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*), in spite of the very early date. A.S.T. had had previous experience of observing this species and was confident of identification, although we would have desired confirmation in the form of call and flight observations.

A. S. THOM AND E. CRACKLES.

#### FLOCKING OF COMMON SANDPIPER.

WITH reference to the records (*antea*, vol. xliii, p. 230) of flocking by Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), the habit is certainly well-established in parts of the species' winter quarters. The bird is widespread throughout most of West Africa, being most abundant in autumn and spring, although a few remain during the summer, and many during the winter.

Apart from periods of extra high tides in the mangrove swamp areas, when patches of dry land are so scarce that flocking, and some-

times even perching in low trees, is unavoidable, I have on numerous occasions seen parties of twenty to fifty together, especially towards dusk. A feature of these gatherings is the excited calling and constant short flights to and fro. I have not noted the direct, high flight in compact flocks which is mentioned in the note quoted above, and suggest that such behaviour is more to be expected of birds which are actually on migration. It is pertinent to remark that the Common Sandpipers which I have heard at night off the West African coast have passed at a considerable height, and have given me—from their calls—the impression of moving in small flocks of about the size seen in England. Since writing the above, I have found that similar observations of flocking have been made by G. C. Young (*Ibis* (1946), p. 357), who remarked on an increase in the activity in spring, and by a writer in a private Nigerian journal in 1932.

P. I. R. MACLAREN.

COMMON SANDPIPER NESTING ON ROCK ON SEA-SHORE.  
ON June 25th, 1942, I found a Common Sandpiper's (*Actitis hypoleucos*) nest in a very odd position on a beach near Ballantrae, Ayrshire. At the end of a long shingle slope the beach changed its character completely and became a mass of rocks and rock-pools in which were sea-anemones and the usual rock-pool inhabitants. The rocks stretched inland to the base of a low cliff, and on a solid rock about 4 feet high, only just above high-water mark, was a nest with two warm eggs in it, apparently those of a Common Sandpiper. The top of the rock was not quite flat and sloped landwards, and the nest was in a slight depression sheltered on the sea side by a small rock edge an inch or two high. Not being able to believe my eyes, I spent some time two days later watching the bird return to the nest and had an excellent view of it as it stood a long time preening and drying before settling down on the eggs, and it was certainly a Common Sandpiper. Neither *The Handbook* nor any other book I have seen mentions such a place as a nesting-site.

M. D. CROSBY.

#### LAPWING NESTING ON SHINGLE BEACH.

WITH reference to the note (*antea*, vol. xliii, p. 131), I can record two instances of Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) nesting on shingle beaches. The first nest was found on May 14th, 1943, on a shingle beach near Ballantrae, Ayrshire. There were four eggs and the nest was not more than thirty yards above extreme high-tide mark, which was marked on the landward side of the shingle slope by a line of "wrack" on which terns were nesting. Oyster-catchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) and Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) were nesting also about the same distance inland as the Lapwing, on plain shingle. The other nest was found on June 8th, 1948, on the landward side of the Chesil Beach, about three miles from Portland, Dorset, again on plain shingle. The nest was made of a few bents and had four eggs. The position beyond the landward slope of the shingle was similar to that of the Ballantrae nest, except that the Chesil Bank is much higher. Nests of Common and Little

Terns (*Sterna hirundo* and *S. albifrons*) were in the vicinity. In both cases there was inshore water, the Fleet by the Chesil Bank and pools at Ballantrae. M. D. CROSBY.

[Attention is drawn to a misprint (*antea*, vol. xliii, p. 131) where the reference to previous records of this habit should be vol. xxxviii, p. 357, not vol. xxxvii.—Eds.]

#### ADULT BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS OCCURRING IN THE JUVENILE OYSTER-CATCHER.

MAKKINK ("Contribution to the knowledge of the behaviour of the Oyster-catcher," *Ardea* 31 (1, 2) 1942) says: "The attitude in which the parent birds with food walk to their young ones was strongly reminiscent of that of the male prior to copulation ('stealthy walk'). It is quite possible that this is one of the many cases in which an attitude belonging elsewhere in the ethological repertory is being used as an introduction to copulation." (p. 50).

In support of this view, and amplification of it, may be given the following observation, made whilst watching an adult and juvenile Oyster-catcher (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*) on the North Haven shore at Fair Isle on June 18th, 1948. The young one persistently moved about its parent at very close quarters, sometimes almost touching as it passed in front or behind, with the same "stealthy walk" as described and figured by Makkink. The adult remained still most of the time, or moved only a few steps. The young one's movements were interrupted by probing with the bill in the wet sand, or by picking up food, but the attitude did not change. Once the parent picked at the sand with its bill, and the young one immediately came up and did the same at exactly the same spot, appearing to procure some food. (See Makkink, p. 50, for a similar observation). Identical behaviour in the same two birds was watched on the shore on July 20th, when the female again invited the attention of the juvenile to some item of food (which the latter took) by a deliberate picking action at the water's edge.

From these observations it would appear likely that the "stealthy walk" of the male prior to coition is one of the many examples of adult posturing which has its origin in the actions of the young bird. The juvenile had a short, quiet trill which it struck me might in the same way be the origin of the characteristic call "twee-twee-twee" mentioned by Makkink as accompanying copulation (p. 25).

Makkink (p. 29) adduces as evidence for the sexual origin of the piping display the fact that it does not take place among juvenile birds. The conclusion may well be true, but no support is to be found for it in the behaviour of young birds, as already shown by Richardson (*antea*, vol. xlii, p. 221). A party of Oyster-catchers on the rocks of the south-west coast of Fair Isle on August 14th, 1948, comprized three adults and two juveniles, the latter with grey legs and lacking the red eye-rim. Two adults began to pipe at the third, and the juveniles adopted the same attitude with hunched backs, down-bent heads and bills pointing to the ground, and moved along in this attitude with the adults. So far

as I could see, however, the young remained silent during the demonstration.

Further evidence that this pattern is not exclusive to adults is provided by an observation made in the same area on September 12th, 1949, in which two juveniles piped in characteristic fashion at a third, which walked before them, apparently in an attempt to make it leave the offshore skerry on which they were feeding. The bird did not leave, and after a short time the trio became quiet and settled down to feed together. The characters of immaturity—grey legs, brown-fringed wing-coverts and absence of the red eye-rim—were obvious in all three birds through  $\times 9$  glasses.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

#### “PADDLING” ACTION OF SANDWICH TERNS.

ON April 8th, 1950, there were nine Sandwich Terns (*Sterna sandvicensis*) on a sandbank in Radipole Lake, Weymouth. They were obviously resting while on passage, and I was struck by their strange behaviour. All the birds were facing into the wind, standing in typical hunched-up attitude. Suddenly the leader commenced to patter with the feet, rapidly, in the manner of a Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) when bringing worms to the surface. The other eight followed suit one after the other, until the whole lot were “paddling” hard and moving forward slowly, all the time. At this point the flock suddenly took to the air, wheeling round with hoarse cries. One bird detached itself from the group in the air and flew off, the remainder then landed on the sandbank. After a short while the whole performance took place again and three more birds detached themselves from the main body and flew out of sight. The remaining five landed on the sandbank again, where they stayed until I was forced to leave.

GEOFFREY BOYLE.

#### THE STATUS OF GULLS IN BRECKLAND.

BECAUSE of the publication of scattered notes, a certain amount of confusion has arisen concerning the status of gulls in those parts of West Norfolk and West Suffolk known as Breckland. This note is designed to clarify the matter and to amplify the information in the county ornithologies.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*). In Suffolk a small colony (already described *antea*, vol. xliii, p. 193) exists at the Bury St. Edmunds Beet Factory settling ponds. Between five and ten pairs nested in 1948 and 1949 but only four nests were found in 1950. At the West Stow sewage farm, five miles to the N.W., one pair nested in 1947, but workmen reported a second nest to be unsuccessful. In 1947 about 700 pairs nested on the floods in Lakenheath Fen, on the Western boundary of the district. This colony has been described previously (*antea*, vol. xli, p. 158). Between Downham Market and Stoke Ferry in Norfolk there is a colony at the Wissington Beet Factory settling ponds. The existence of this site had been known for several years, but a breeding-season visit had not been made until 1950, when about 60 nesting pairs were found. The site is actually in the Fenland, by the

R. Wissey, but some of the birds feed in Breckland and it is thought best to include it as it is previously unrecorded. A number of birds also visit the fields and meres in the N.E. part of the area, from the Scoulton colony.

The Black-headed Gull also occurs as a passage migrant.

In winter large numbers arrive daily in the N. and W. parts of the area from the Wash. Sometimes some of these roost inland. To the S. and S.E. birds flight up the Stour valley daily.

COMMON GULL (*Larus canus*). An occasional summer visitor, a passage migrant and a winter visitor. In this last-named category, birds are to be found in small numbers with the Black-headed Gull, but in considerably larger numbers than that species in a belt along the W. and N.W. boundaries of the region.

HERRING-GULL (*Larus argentatus*). Doubtless odd individuals may turn up at any time of the year, but it is as a winter visitor that this species is most prominent. In recent years it has arrived to winter in the area in increasing numbers each year. In 1947-48 under 50 birds wintered, but in 1948-49 up to 1,000 arrived and in 1949-50 a peak of about 3,000 was attained. These birds roost at Thompson Water and Mickle Mere, N. of Thetford, Norfolk, and feed by day on the heaths and fields in both Norfolk and West Suffolk.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*). A spring and autumn passage migrant. It is perhaps fitting here to include a correction to a note published by D. E. Sergeant and the writer in 1948 (*antea*, vol. xli, p. 190). In stating that this species was wintering inland in Norfolk we made a most regrettable error in identification, as it has since been shown that the flocks observed were made up of a mixture of Herring- and Great Black-backed Gulls. No example of the Lesser Black-back has since been identified during winter and it must be concluded that there was none present during the winters of 1946-47 and 1947-48. However, it may be added that other members of the Cambridge Bird Club had reported Lesser Black-backs as early as 1944 and it is a matter of conjecture to which species these may be referred.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*). This species is a winter visitor in the same way as the Herring-Gull. Reports collected from local farmers indicate that it has been an occasional winter visitor in small numbers, generally to be associated with hard weather, for as long as they can remember. In 1946-47 under 50 birds wintered, in 1947-48 probably about 100, in 1948-49 a peak of 450 (already described, *antea*, vol. xliii, p. 61) and in 1949-50 up to 250. They roost on the meres and range widely by day over the Norfolk and West Suffolk heaths. It has been found that they arrive in November and December and most leave by or during March, but a few stay until mid-April. The cessation of the North Sea herring fishery during November coincides with the arrival of the Herring- and Great Black-backed Gulls inland. The

variation in numbers of these two species from day to day suggests that some of the flocks, especially Herring-, travel back and forth between the coast and the meres, feeding and roosting at either place.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*). An immature, probably third winter, was present from February 18th to March 4th, 1950, roosting on Thompson Water and feeding on the heaths nearby.

KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*). This species has been recorded twice. The first, an immature, was seen over Thompson Water on April 17th, 1948, and the second—apparently the first record for West Suffolk—an adult at West Stow sewage farm on January 3rd, 1949.

This note also includes the observations of Messrs. A. L. Bull, D. V. Butt, P. R. Knipe, R. G. Pettitt and D. E. Sergeant, to all of whom the writer is indebted for information. ANTHONY E. VINE.

INLAND BREEDING OF GREAT BACK-BACKED GULL. WHEN visiting a large breeding colony of Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) in the western Pennines on May 10th, 1949, I found a Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) nesting among them. I had very good views of a single adult at the nest, which contained two eggs measuring 78 × 53 mm. Mr. R. M. Band tells me that he saw two pairs of Great Black-backs in the same place later in the summer. At least one pair of Herring-Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) was also present, though breeding was not proved.

The gullery is situated several hundred feet above sea-level and is more than ten miles from the nearest tidal water. Although it must be exceptional for a Great Black-back to breed so far inland in England, this seems to be only one instance of an increasing tendency for these gulls to appear inland at all seasons.

J. A. G. BARNES.

GREENFINCH FEEDING ON BERRIES OF BERBERIS.—Mr. F. R. Pearson sends a record of a Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*) which he watched at Oxford on December 25th, 1949, feeding on the berries of a *Berberis* bush, a food item not recorded in *The Handbook*.

GREENFINCHES ROOSTING IN REED-BED.—Mr. E. M. Cawkell reports that during November, 1949, a party of 20 to 30 Greenfinches (*Chloris chloris*) roosted in the reed beds at Middlebere, Poole Harbour. Such a roosting-site is not recorded in *The Handbook*.

SISKINS FEEDING ON NETTLE SEEDS.—Mr. R. Hewson reports that on November 25th and 28th and December 1st, 1949, he watched small parties of Siskins (*Carduelis spinus*) feeding on the seeds of nettles (*Urtica dioica*) at Muir of Ord, Ross-shire. The same food, which is not recorded in *The Handbook*, is reported by Mr. Alex. Tewnton who watched a single male Siskin feeding on nettle seeds at Aberdeen on January 8th, 1950.

LESSER REDPOLL FEEDING FROM MOSS.—Mr. A. H. Betts reports that on November 13th, 1949, at Orpington, Kent, three Lesser Redpolls

(*Carduelis flammea cabaret*) flew to the roof of a house, where they searched, and apparently fed from, moss growing between the tiles. GOLDCREST EATING MOTH.—Mr. Barry Goater reports that on March 23rd, 1950, near Chandlers Ford, Hants, he watched a Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) eating a Noctuid moth, identified as *Panolis flammea (griseo-variegata)*. In spite of great difficulty in accomplishing this, the bird eventually swallowed the insect, complete with wings. *The Handbook* does not include Lepidoptera in the food of the Goldcrest.

FIRECRESTS IN SOMERSET AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.—We have received from Mr. A. V. Cornish a full description of a Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*) which he saw at Dunster, Somerset, on February 19th, 1950. Mr. J. Staton reports that he examined a dead Firecrest, sent to him from Hucknall, Notts, on March 25th, 1950, by Mr. Austen Dobbs.

REDWINGS FEEDING ON APPLE DUMPS.—Mr. Ronald B. Haynes reports that during a spell of cold weather about January 28th, 1950, he observed quite large flocks of Redwings (*Turdus musicus*) with other *Turdidae* feeding on dumps of rotten apples at Loose, near Maidstone, Kent. This habit is not recorded in *The Handbook*.

REDSTART FEEDING YOUNG ON HAIRY CATERPILLARS.—Mr. R. H. Brown reports that a pair of Redstarts (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) watched at the nest on Underbarrow Scar, Westmorland, were seen to be feeding their eight young on hairy caterpillars, probably of the Oak-egg-moth (*Lasiocampa quercus*).

MERLIN TAKING GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER.—Mr. T. P. Wells informs us that on February 24th, 1950, he received a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) which had been shot at Hutton Roof, near Kirby Lonsdale, Westmorland, while feeding on a Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*).

PASSAGE OF BLACK TERNS IN 1949.—We are indebted to Mr. C. B. Ashby, Editor of the *London Bird Report*, for the following records of Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*), supplied by various observers, which are additional to those already recorded (*antea*, vol. xliii, pp. 178-179):

ESSEX.—Walthamstow Res., up to 16, May 14th-15th.

SURREY.—Barn Elms Res., two, May 12th, 11-15, May 13th-15th, two, May 17th and 22nd; Walton gravel pit, one, June 18th.

HERTS.—Aldenham Res., nine, May 14th.

MIDDLESEX.—Brent Res., one, May 13th; Staines, 5, May 3rd, one, May 4th, 1-15 daily, May 11th-15th, one, May 22nd.

We have also received some additional records for Herts from Mr. A. C. Frost, who reports ten at Wilstone Res., Tring, on May 12th and on May 14th, when a separate flock of 16, already recorded, arrived in the afternoon; he also saw 8 at a gravel pit near Rickmansworth on May 13th.

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