

NOTES.

Long-tailed Tits' unorthodox nesting arrangements.—On April 21st, 1951, the writers found the nest of a Long-tailed Tit (*Ægithalos caudatus*) in the main fork of an apple tree near Brandon, Suffolk. Such a site is unusual in East Anglia, and the nest had the further distinction of an entrance hole at front and rear. The female was then about to lay. The nest was inspected intermittently during the next fortnight, and it was even then noticeable that there were three Long-tailed Tits in the nesting area, though it was not possible to distinguish the sexes.

On May 19th, the young were *c.* three days old and the presumed female was brooding them. She invariably sat with her head looking out of the northern entrance and her tail projecting vertically from the southern entrance. When she moved about inside the nest to attend the young, the tail waved above it like a small semaphore arm. From a hide at 4 ft. it immediately became apparent that the three birds previously observed were all (as we had suspected) taking part in the nesting operation. It was also possible to distinguish their sexes with some certainty. The brooding bird who received and passed on food to the young had a heavily abraded tail (which was not surprising) and was clearly a female. Of the other two, one was whiter about the head and shoulders than the other, and, to judge from their behaviour, both were males. These two worked in complete harmony; both would arrive near the nest simultaneously, and while one passed food to the female, the other awaited his turn. The female would accept both catches, and when the males had gone off hunting together, would pass on the food to the young.

Each male had his own approach, one feeding from the right of the nest, the other from the left. With the female present they made no attempt to enter except once, when the whiter male went in at one hole and out of the other with the female still brooding. On another occasion this bird flew off with a feather which he had wrenched from the southern entrance, dropped it 20 yards away, fluttered after it to the ground, and brought it back to the N. entrance. He offered it to the female, who took it into the nest.

When the young were *c.* five days old, the two males returned to the nest for the first observed time when the female was absent. For a short time they hovered round with the characteristic chirring warble, seemingly at a loss; then the dark bird fed the young himself and the other succeeded him. As the young grew, and the female's absences became more frequent, the males fed them without further hesitation.

By the time the young were *c.* nine days old either entrance was being used indiscriminately by all three birds, and in the female's absence the males would normally enter at one and leave by the other. The female brooded the young for short periods almost to the fledging date, usually bringing food with her and remaining in

the nest, which by then resembled that of a Chaffinch (*Fringilla caelebs*), with a felted "basket" handle; the two entrances were ragged and much enlarged. Ten chicks fledged, and one egg was added.

A. W. P. ROBERTSON AND S. C. PORTER.

Woodchat Shrikes in Surrey and Suffolk.—Messrs. A. R. F. Hills and E. Giles have supplied a satisfactory report of a Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*) seen at Bookham Common, Leatherhead, Surrey, on May 26th and 27th, 1951. Excellent views were obtained. Mr. Peter J. Oram has sent details of a Woodchat Shrike on a common near Dunwich, Suffolk, on June 10th, 1951. Another at Skokholm is reported on p. 243. We published (*antea*, vol. xlv, p. 63) three records of this species for 1950; *The Sussex Bird Report* (1950, p. 9) adds another, a pair seen at Paghham on May 19th.

It seems possible that this species, of which "over forty" occurrences are mentioned in *The Handbook*, is now appearing in greater numbers. We would be glad to receive further records.

Red-breasted Flycatcher in Surrey in June.—At about 12.30 p.m., on June 10th, 1951, I saw a very small bird perched on a low barbed-wire fence on the Ockham and Martyrs Green road in Surrey; I identified it as a Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa parva*). It was not more than about $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. in length. Upper-parts were grey-brown with the head greyer still; bill brownish. The throat and upper breast were a warm orange, darker on the chin and throat. The breast patch was medium in width and short in length. The under-parts were creamy-white and the under tail-feathers conspicuously white, seeming to extend to the side of the tail and maybe onto the top of the tail though I was unable to get a clear view of the bird from above. The legs were brownish in colour.

The bird was very active like all flycatchers, and its tail and head were moving all the time. The tail was flicked rapidly up and down and the head seemed to move in time with it. The bird did not call during the five minutes I had it under observation.

E. L. CROUCH.

Pallas's Warbler at Monks' House, Northumberland.—On October 13th a willow-covered burn was being driven towards the garden Heligoland trap here, when what appeared to be one of several newly-arrived Goldcrests (*Regulus regulus*) flew into the trap. Goldcrests normally take no notice of the driving. I then saw that it was *not* a Goldcrest and, on going round to the gathering-box, found what I took to be a Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*). But, on handling, the prominent central crown-streak; the brilliant yellow superciliary stripes meeting at the nape; the sharply defined lemon-buff bar, a quarter of an inch wide, across the rump; and the minute size decided in favour of Pallas's Warbler (*Phylloscopus proregulus*), presumably an adult male from the brilliance of its colouring. Although none of us had seen before either Pallas's or Yellow-browed Warblers, the seven of us who examined the bird in

the hand (and later at large at "goldcrest range" in low thinly-foliaged willows) were satisfied that it could only be *Ph. proregulus* according to the descriptions given in *The Handbook*. We noted when the bird was in the hand that the third, fourth, fifth and sixth (slightly) primaries were emarginated; fourth and fifth equal in length and third considerably shorter.

It was ringed (MD 616) and released and went straight back to the willows, where it remained collecting aphids with the Goldcrests for the rest of the day. It spent the morning of the following day, October 14th, in the willows and, at midday, flew across into a large sycamore tree: the flight was exactly like a Goldcrest's. It remained in this tree until evening, flitting about and frequently hovering to pick aphids off leaves, but remaining persistently beneath the canopy of the crown of the tree. It was never seen to work out to the exterior of the tree, nor to hover below terminal leaf-clusters, as a Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) or a Willow-Warbler (*Ph. trochilus*) would have done; and yet, in the willows, it had taken very little more notice of our presence than did the Goldcrests. In the evening it returned to the willows and also, for the first time, visited an adjacent row of stunted firs; when, at last, several members of the Ornithological Section of the Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne N.H.S. had clear views of the bird at close range. They agreed with our findings and diagnosis of the previous day. It was active until dusk, for an hour after the Goldcrests had retired to roost, and disappeared on the following day, October 15th.

It was, if anything, even smaller than a Goldcrest, which it resembled fairly closely in habits but not in appearance. It was more prone to hover; apt to flit farther between bouts of searching; and seldom hung upside down. The wings were flicked incessantly in a dunnock-like way. The silhouette was not so rounded; the general coloration darker above and paler below; much brighter in hue; and the impression of pattern much more pronounced; the folded wing-tips were longer in proportion to the tail and the legs shorter and darker; the eye was smaller and the "face longer" than in the Goldcrest.

This would seem to be its second occurrence in Britain, the first bird having been "obtained" at Cley (Norfolk) on October 31st, 1896. On the present occasion a heavy passage of Robins, Blackbirds, Song-Thrushes, Redwings, Bramblings and Goldcrests had been in progress for several days, in spite of predominant south winds only occasionally veering east. E. A. R. ENNION.

[Dr. Ennion's account published above was accompanied by some excellent coloured sketches made on the spot, which help to confirm the identification. Mr. H. G. Alexander, who has very wide experience of the *Phylloscopi* in the field, is satisfied that the bird must have been *proregulus*. It is clear that *proregulus* is the only member of the genus on the British list which fits Dr. Ennion's description, but

it has occurred only once before and the probability of its occurrence a second time is not much greater than that of other species not yet identified in Britain. The combination of the distinctive head-markings and a yellow band on the rump, and the absence of white outer tail-feathers are diagnostic.—EDS.]

Subalpine Warblers at Fair Isle and Cley.—A feature of the spring, 1951, migration at Fair Isle was the capture of two adult male Subalpine Warblers (*Sylvia cantillans*), the seventh and eighth records of the species in the British Isles. An account of the trapping of these two birds was given in *Fair Isle Bird Observatory Bulletin*, Nos. 2 and 3, 1951, but it may be of interest to publish the main points here, together with a note on the meteorological conditions prevailing at the time.

The first bird arrived on May 20th and remained until 27th. It was first seen by Philip Andrews, one of the observers then staying at the hostel, among some derelict rusty iron girders on a sheltered beach close to the South Lighthouse. It was obviously very tired, and sat in the sun with ruffled plumage and half-closed eyes. It was much more active on subsequent days, seeking insects on the lichen-covered slabs of a cliff near by, often in close proximity to other small warblers. Periodically it returned to the beach and sought the warmth and shelter of the rusty girders where it had been first seen, sometimes feeding industriously on the Chironomid gnats which were attracted by the upcurrent of warm air from the iron-work. A makeshift trap, consisting of the Yeoman Net closed at one end with a catching-box, was set in position over the girders on 22nd, and next morning Andrews, Max Budgen and H. A. Craw succeeded in catching the bird.

Plumage.

It had a Nuthatch-grey head and back, brown and abraded wing-feathers, a rich dark chestnut breast, and a delicate pinkish-buff suffusion on the sides of belly and flanks. The chestnut was in the form of a "bib" whose margin was clearly defined, not merging with the pinkish-buff below. The tail was darker than the back, blackish-brown except for the outermost feathers, which were paler and had the outer webs and part of the inner webs white. There was some white on the tips of the penultimate pair. The rump was a cleaner blue-grey than the mantle. There were pale brown fringes on the tertials only, and whitish tips to the tertials and inner secondaries. The most striking features were the clear white moustachial streaks separating the chestnut and grey, and the startling red rims which encircled the eyes—"eyes like a miniature Oyster-catcher," as one observer remarked.

After examination the bird was set free at the place of capture, where it remained, usually haunting the lichen-covered cliff, until the 27th. When in the laboratory it made a noise very like the "churr" of a Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*), but on the beach

the only call it was heard to utter, and that infrequently, was a hard "chep." It was examined in the lab. and watched in the field by R. Shepherd, Philip Perkins, R. E. Sharland, D. V. Freshwater, A. Colin Russell and Dr. R. G. Mayall in addition to the writer and those already named above.

When my wife and I made the routine evening visit to the Vaadal Trap on June 9th a small grey warbler with white outer tail-feathers rose from the streamside and entered the trap. It proved to be a second male Subalpine Warbler, in even more abraded plumage than the first. There were some slight differences between the two: the dark chestnut of the breast did not appear to be so rich in the second case, and the white moustachial streaks were less well-defined. There was also a complete absence of pale fringes on the worn tertials and inner secondaries. The wing-formula of both specimens agreed in that the second primary was 1.5 mm. shorter than the fifth, which suggests that they belonged to the typical race rather than *Sylvia c. albistriata* of S.E. Europe and Asia Minor, in which the second primary is longer than the fifth.

Both birds had a chestnut "eyebrow" set in the grey of the head directly above the eye. The legs were pale brown, the soles yellowish and the eye-rims brick-red. The colour of the iris itself was pale brown. The bill was black with the basal half of the lower mandible purplish-flesh and the tomia yellow. The weights and measurements were, respectively: 10.11 g. and 9.28 g.; wing-length 64 mm. and 57 mm.—the latter extremely worn, however; bill from skull 11 mm. and 10.5 mm.; tarsus 19 mm. in both cases.

The Weather.

Examination of the Daily Weather Reports of the Meteorological Office, London, suggests that both birds reached the British area from the north of Italy rather than from the Iberian Peninsula or South of France. The first may have travelled via a col between two high pressure systems, as already described elsewhere (p. 248). There were more arrivals at Fair Isle on the 20th, during the day, than on any other date in spring, and they included Lesser Whitethroats (which reached their peak with over 50 birds), Common Whitethroats (building up to peak on 21st), a male Blue-headed (*Motacilla f. flava*) and three female *flava* wagtails, and three male Red-spotted Bluethroats (*Luscinia s. svecica*). Somewhat similar conditions obtained during June 7-8th, although in this case neither of the anticyclones was so extensive. A shallow low covered France and western Germany, and there was again a S.E. airstream from the north of Italy through central Germany, backing easterly in Denmark and the Netherlands and the North Sea area. It is possible that the continuance of anticyclonic weather, with light winds favourable to migration, failed to inhibit the urge to migrate when the breeding-area was reached, causing the birds to overshoot their normal range and drift N.W. across the Continent between the two highs.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

At 3 p.m. on June 11th, 1951 as I was about to enter Cley Bird Observatory, a small warbler flew past me and dived into some barbed wire. The bird was flushed easily, and upon alighting in a bush near by was recognised as a male Subalpine Warbler. I drove the bird, with ease, into the Heligoland trap, but unfortunately the trap was unmaned and under repair, the catching-box door being closed and the swing door to the catching chamber missing. Despite my efforts to catch the bird it flew past me out of the trap. The following description was obtained whilst the bird was in a bush sheltered from a strong east wind. Bill dark, yellowish at base; eye noticeably red in the field, and at under three feet range in the trap it appeared *very* red. The whole of the upper-parts blue-grey, deepest on the head. Wings grey-brown, primaries darker, secondaries edged light buff. Tail decidedly browner than upper-parts, outer tail-feathers white, faintly tinged buff. A thin, but quite distinct white moustachial stripe from the base of the bill, separated the grey of the upper-parts from the pink of the under-parts. The pink of the under-parts was deepest on the throat and faded out on the flanks. Under tail-coverts white, faintly washed dirty yellow. Feet bright yellow-flesh. The bird was left at 4.30 p.m. and at 5.30 p.m. it was flushed by P.J.H. and R. A. Richardson, who confirmed the above description. All other efforts to trap the bird failed, and it was last seen by R.A.R. at 7.0 p.m. This is the first record for England and Norfolk.

P. J. HAYMAN.

Gull-billed Terns in Sussex.—On September 17th, 1950, at Shoreham, Sussex, we had several good flight views of a Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*). The bird first drew our attention by its disyllabic call which was much higher pitched and less grating than that of a Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) which we had seen near by a few hours previously. We interpreted it as "kee-vick" or "kee-rick."

The following is a description compiled from our combined notes taken on the spot: In size approximating to a Sandwich Tern, but of more stocky build and having a considerably less forked tail. The flight was decidedly gull-like. The whole of the head was white except for some greyish markings on the crown and a conspicuous blackish patch just behind the eye. The rest of the upper-parts were uniform pale grey with the exception of the primaries which were greyish-brown, appearing darker beneath. The under-parts were white. The bill was noticeably short, stout and completely black, with a slight curve to the upper mandible.

The bird made no attempt to dive while under observation, but flew rather aimlessly over the fields and mud-flats adjoining the river.

We should mention that a southerly gale had prevailed on the night of September 16th and persisted throughout the following day.

The bird could not be found in the locality next day or on subsequent occasions.

C. F. BROWN AND JOHN SHEPPERD.

On April 25th, 1951, D. D. H. saw a Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) at Langney Point, Sussex. It came in from a westerly direction, only a few yards off shore, perched for a short time on the iron "basket" marking the end of the sewage outlet, then circled briefly, coming down once to feed from the surface and finally made off in an easterly direction along the coast. The following particulars were noted: size and coloration similar to those of a Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*), but could be at once distinguished from this species by its heavier, more stocky shape and by its slower, heavier flight; tail less forked than that of a Sandwich Tern; bill, well seen in flight and when perched, shortish, thick and completely black; no call heard. An easterly passage of terns, including Sandwich, was taking place at the time. On July 29th, 1951, we both saw a Gull-billed Tern, likewise at Langney Point. In this case also the bird came in from a westerly direction, very near in, and, after slowly circling round two or three times, made off towards the east. The size and colour were much as those of an adult Sandwich Tern in summer plumage but we were both at once struck by its shorter and stockier build and by its slow, heavy flight. The tail was less forked than that of a Sandwich Tern. Good views, at a range of less than 50 yards, were obtained of the black bill, both binoculars and telescope being used. It had no pale tip and in any case was shaped differently from that of a Sandwich Tern, being noticeably short and thick. No call was heard. A sudden change of wind, from S.W. to N.E., had just taken place.

D. D. HARBER AND A. R. MEAD-BRIGGS.



LONG-TAILED TIT (*Ægithalos caudatus*).

UPPER : TWO MALES AT NEST, ONE FEEDING YOUNG, THE OTHER WAITING HIS TURN TO DO SO.

LOWER : FEMALE WITH TAIL PROJECTING FROM SECOND NEST ENTRANCE.
(Photographed by Commander A. W. P. ROBERTSON).

(See p. 257).