

## Notes

**Manx Shearwaters and other sea-birds as prey of Peregrines and Golden Eagles.**—The following observations may be of interest in view of the recent note by A. J. Gaston (*Brit. Birds*, 57: 466-467). On 30th September 1964, at about 2,000 feet on Hallival, Isle of Rhum, I saw a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* eating a Manx Shearwater *Procellaria puffinus*. As I approached, it left the carcass which proved to be a freshly killed young bird with down still attached to the under-parts; part of the breast had been eaten. Shearwaters breed on all sides of Hallival from about 1,500 feet to the top (2,365 feet). I have also often seen shearwater remains at Peregrine plucking places on the coastal cliffs of Rhum, while in August 1960 Phillip MacRae reported putting up a Peregrine from Welshman's Rock and finding more than six fresh shearwater kills.

Manx Shearwaters are no less frequently taken by Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* on Rhum. Castings and samples of food collected from accessible eyries in 1958, 1960, 1962 and 1963 all contained shearwater remains. In 1960 the eaglet in one eyrie very close to the breeding colonies was fed mainly on adult shearwaters; in the early spring, when there has sometimes been a high mortality amongst the shearwaters in the colonies, Golden Eagles have been seen feeding on ones which have obviously been dead for some time, but it is not known how the large number of shearwaters carried to this eaglet were taken.

Other sea-bird remains recorded in Golden Eagle eyries on Rhum have included Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* (1957, 1960 and 1962), Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* (1957, 1960, 1962 and 1963), Guillemots *Uria aalge* (1963), Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* (1963) and Shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* (1964). In 1957 one eaglet was reared on a diet consisting largely of young Herring Gulls, and in 1963 Fulmars were the main food of another. On 15th August 1963 the eyrie vacated by the latter eaglet was inspected and found to contain many sea-bird remains including the corpses of twenty full-grown Fulmars: some of these had been partly plucked and the breasts of a few had been eaten, but most were intact. On 20th March 1964 a number of pellets and other food remains were collected from a favourite roosting place of Golden Eagles and from an eyrie on the north side of the island: these were kindly analysed by Ernest Blezard and the samples from both sites proved to contain the remains of Shags. P. WORMELL

[Letters on the subject of Peregrines preying on Manx Shearwaters appear on pages 153-154.—EDS.]

**Observer mobbed by adult Cuckoo when approaching juvenile.—**

In mid-June 1962, on the Pentland Hills, Midlothian, I saw a juvenile Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* being fed by a pair of Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* in a gorse bush near the edge of a deciduous wood. After a few minutes I approached to within 30 feet, whereupon an adult Cuckoo flew towards me from the wood. It swooped to within six feet of my head and then returned to a tree in the wood, all the time uttering a loud and excited call which might be described as something between a chatter and a chuckle. I then noticed a second adult Cuckoo near-by in another tree; this bird was making the same noise—which, according to Dr. D. A. Bannerman's *The Birds of the British Isles* (1955, 4: 127), appears to be one that is uttered by males only.

The first Cuckoo flew at me three more times, almost as if trying to protect the juvenile, which had moved only a few feet during this time. However, when the latter flew about 200 yards away both adults went off together for a similar distance in the opposite direction, one of them uttering the characteristic *cuc-coo* of the male, and there was no further reaction from them when I approached the juvenile again. The behaviour of the Meadow Pipits was not noted. A. PAUL BELL

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker attacking galls.—**On 3rd January 1965, near Colchester, Essex, we saw a male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* flying low along a thick hedgerow. It alighted momentarily on a dog-rose *Rosa sp.* and then flew to another. There, from a distance of about 30 feet, we observed it attacking a gall with tit-like postures and acrobatics. After about ten minutes it flew off and we found that the gall had been opened and the larva removed. In fact, over 30 galls in the immediate vicinity had been similarly treated and it seemed clear that this particular woodpecker was in the habit of feeding on the grubs inside them. Since then we have found many other galls opened in this way in an area of several square miles. A. K. WOOLSEY, G. E. EVANS and B. FROST

**Numbers of Magpies preying on a roost of Tree Sparrows.—**In August and September 1964 I made regular visits to a marsh of *Phragmites* reeds in the old course of the river Ebro about 22 miles north-west of Zaragoza in north Spain. This marsh is about 500 yards long and 100 yards wide. Each evening large congregations of Magpies *Pica pica* used to gather in olive groves and wet fields adjoining the north side of it. Chattering parties assembled from all points of the compass and settled both in the trees and on the ground. It was hard to assess their numbers, but a conservative estimate suggested that about 250 were present by dusk.

The marsh was also the roosting place of several hundred Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*. The first of these used to appear roughly

half an hour before sundown. Invariably they gathered to the east of the marsh and flighted en masse in a straight line to the centre of the reeds, thus by-passing the area where the Magpies were. A maximum of about 1,200 Tree Sparrows was involved, though the numbers had dropped to some 800 by early September (incidentally, 80 were trapped and ringed). They were very noisy and they seemed to roost near the bases of the reeds, which were up to seven feet high.

At dusk there was great activity. Small bands of Magpies, six or seven strong, sallied forth from the olives and plunged into the reeds. Clouds of Tree Sparrows erupted in confusion. The Magpies seemed clumsy and inefficient, but when one was successful in catching a Tree Sparrow it retired to the trees or some outlying rocks to consume it. I had the impression that at least some of the Magpies carried the sparrows in their feet, but I could not be sure of this in the poor light; certainly they used their feet to clamp the corpses against branches or rocks while they pecked at them. By no means all of the Magpies engaged in this behaviour: a maximum of 60 was involved in any one evening and by half an hour after sunset all was usually quiet. The predation inflicted was not great, but the method certainly seemed original. The size of the concentration of Magpies was also extraordinarily large, although Prof. F. Bernis informs me that flocks of 100 or so are not uncommon in Spain.

R. L. ROLFE

**Female Blackbird catching newts.**—Towards the end of May 1964 a pair of Blackbirds *Turdus merula* built a nest in our porch at Claygate, Surrey. One day when the nest contained eggs my husband and I saw the female Blackbird go to the pond in our garden and cock her head as though listening for sound or looking for movement under the water. She then splashed or dived into the pond and reappeared with a newt which she killed by banging it on the ground before flying off with it in her beak. This became a regular habit and later, after her eggs hatched, she would fly straight from the pond to the nest with a newt in her beak, presumably with a view to feeding it to her two young. All the newts were some four to five inches long. The young disappeared before fledging, but the catching of the newts went on. On one occasion I was cleaning the pond and was called away. When I returned I found the blanket weed strewn round the garden and the Blackbird pulling it apart looking for newts. When she tired of the pond she would come quite close to me when I was digging in the garden and would take worms inches from my hand. The last I saw of her was in early July when I had to go away for about three weeks.

J. ATKINSON

[Mrs. Atkinson has kindly sent us two photographs of the Blackbird with a newt, but unfortunately these are not suitable for reproduction.—Eds.]

**Bullfinch nesting in reeds over water.**—In June 1961, near Swindon, Wiltshire, I was surprised to find the nest of a pair of Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* in a small reed-bed at the edge of a lake. This was constructed normally of fine twigs lined with black root fibres, but being built around three or four reed-stalks and about three feet above the water it was in a site more suitable for Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. The Bullfinches successfully reared a brood of four.

G. L. WEYMAN

**Bullfinch nesting in sedges over water.**—On 5th June 1963, at Southill Lake, Bedfordshire, with Dr. Bruce Campbell and D. W. Elliott, I found the nest of a pair of Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, containing three eggs, in what seemed a most unusual situation. It was built in a tussock of sedges no less than nine feet out from the edge of the lake and two feet above the water. Being a typical structure of small twigs lined with rootlets and hair, it looked quite out of place. Bullfinches were very common in Southill Park at that time and we found three other nests in normal sites on the same day.

I. J. FERGUSON-LEES