

Ornithological Notes from Derbyshire, for the year 1905.

By the REV. FRANCIS C. R. JOURDAIN, M.A., M.B.O.U.



THE weather during the latter half of January, 1905, was very severe, and the 16th was almost the most bitterly cold day I can remember. A strong and piercing wind blew all day, and towards nightfall fine spicules of ice began to fall. After a time this changed to snow, which remained on the ground till nearly the end of the month. During this time the thermometer several times registered only a few degrees above zero. It is almost needless to say that the birds suffered much during this spell of Arctic weather, but curiously enough the summer migrants in several cases arrived much earlier than usual. On March 13th, I noticed a hen Stonechat close to the bank of the River Dove near Rocester. These birds have become very scarce in the county of late years, and though twenty or thirty years ago a few pairs used to breed in the Dove valley, they have long ceased to do so. A cock bird was noticed at Thorpe five days afterwards.

On March 20th two Sand Martins found their way up the Dove valley to the cutting near Clifton station, and were followed on the 27th by a small flock of a dozen or so. This is the earliest record of the appearance of these birds of which I have any note during the last twenty-nine years. On the 25th, three Sandpipers were reported from Repton by J. E. C.

Godber, and on the same day Lapwings' nests were found with full clutches. By about the 27th Wheatears had returned to their summer quarters on Thorpe Cloud.

Some of our more hardy resident birds must have nested exceptionally early this year. Thus a Brown Owl's nest contained three young in down at the end of February, nearly a month before the time when eggs are generally laid, and a Dipper's nest on the Henmore brook had young almost fledged on April 12th.

During part of the months of April and May I was abroad, and in consequence my notes for this period are rather scanty. The Chiffchaff once more failed to put in an appearance in the upper Dove valley, to which it was until the last year or two a regular spring visitor. The most interesting feature of the season, however, was the re-appearance of the Merlin on the moors near Bakewell, as recorded by Mr. W. Storrs Fox in the *Zoologist*, 1905, p. 267. These beautiful little moorland hawks have been so persecuted by keepers that it is marvellous that any are still to be met with in the county. Two nests were found: the first was about $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles N.N.E. of Bakewell, and contained the rather unusual number of five eggs, on May 29th. Both old birds were trapped. On June 28th another nest was found about six miles N.E. of Bakewell, and some three miles from the first. Curiously enough this nest contained five well-grown young birds in the usual smoke grey down. The female was trapped and the male shot.

A nest of the Great Spotted Woodpecker, about 35 ft. high in a dead tree not far from Dovedale, contained six fresh eggs on June 6th. Higher up were two old nesting holes, which had evidently been used in former years. Another pair must have bred in Manners Wood, near Bakewell, from whence a young bird was brought alive to Mr. Storrs Fox on June 25th.

The summer and autumn were exceptionally dry, and the rainfall for the year very much below the average. In many parts of England Swifts and various species of *Hirundinidæ* were observed much later than usual. A single Swift was busily

hawking about among a crowd of Martins and Swallows between Ashbourne and Parwich on September 3rd. The House Martins had young in the nests up to the beginning of October, and on the 21st of that month a good many were flying about the Dove valley near Mayfield. A single Swallow was noted at Darley on November 6th (G. Pullen), and six were seen at Repton about the same time (J. E. C. Godber). But even more remarkable is the fact that on November 25th, while an old House Martin's nest on a cottage at Burton-on-Trent was being knocked down, a single Martin flew out (H. G. Tomlinson).

On September 30th, Mr. Herbert Tomlinson, while shooting on the Burton sewage farm, near Egginton, killed a fine Curlew Sandpiper, *Tringa subarquata* (Güld.). It was accompanied by another bird of the same species. When revising the list of Derbyshire birds for the *Victoria History of the County of Derby*, I was unable to include this species in the county list, as, though specimens are to be found in at least one local collection, no information can be obtained respecting them. By the addition of this bird the number of species definitely recorded from the county is raised to 235, exclusive of those which are supposed to have escaped from confinement. It is interesting to note that, like so many of our rarer waders, this bird was obtained on the sewage farm, which has proved extraordinarily attractive to birds of this family. It is in Mr. Tomlinson's possession, and has the feathers of the mantle edged with buff, as is usual in birds of the year. On the same day that this bird was shot, another of our rarer winter migrants was also killed at the same place, viz., a Little Stint, *Tringa minuta* (Leisl).

Another remarkable visitor which has occurred for the first time in Derbyshire during the past year is the Common or Roseate Pelican, *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (L.). On November 4th, one of these fine birds was flying over the Derwent valley, and, attracted by the water, settled in a field near the river. Its appearance caused great consternation among the cattle and sheep grazing close at hand, which is not unnatural when the

enormous spread of wing (about 12 ft.) in this species is taken into consideration. It was stalked and shot by a local inn-keeper, Mr. S. Stevens, and sent to Mr. Hutchinson for preservation. According to the local papers it weighed 50 lb., although it had not fed recently. On inspecting it the plumage proved to be in good order and clean, and the feathers showed no signs of abrasion, such as one might expect to find in a caged bird. It is quite evident also that it possessed considerable powers of flight. Still so many of these fine birds are kept in semi-confinement in Zoological Gardens and public parks, not only in the British Isles, but also on the Continent, that one hesitates without further evidence to regard it as anything more than an escaped bird. Mr. Hutchinson informs me that it was wild and difficult to approach, and proved to be a male on dissection. A herd of Wild Swans, nineteen in number, which were seen flying over the Trent near Willington on the afternoon of December 3rd, probably belonged to the species known as Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus bewicki* (Yarr.), a still larger flock of which visited us during the preceding winter.

The weather during the latter part of the year was very open and dry, and hardly any rain fell in the month of December. On the whole the breeding season has been a good one for most birds; game has been plentiful, and some of our rarer birds are beginning to benefit by the partial protection extended to them. It is, however, necessary once more to point out that to a large proportion of gamekeepers and water-bailiffs the well-meant protection orders of our County Council are still absolutely a dead letter.