

## Ornithological Record for Derbyshire, 1918.

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By N. H. FITZHERBERT.

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THE winter of 1917-18 was mild. In December and the early part of January there were some sharp frosts, but they did not last, and the quick changes from cold weather to warm and *vice versa* were remarkable. At the end of January the weather became extraordinarily mild and there was a promise of a very early spring, which was however falsified by a severe "blackthorn winter" in April. This began about the 6th and lasted for more than a fortnight, with leaden skies and bitterly cold winds; it was at last brought to an end by some heavy snowstorms, and on the 22nd spring came at last. With the help of the mild winter most of the resident birds have again reached their normal numbers. In the neighbourhood of Somersal Blackbirds were as common as ever this year, and Song-Thrushes only slightly less numerous than usual; Missel-Thrushes were, however, scarce in the breeding season, though there were plenty to be seen in the autumn and winter. Chaffinches were to be heard and seen everywhere, more plentiful than Sparrows; on April 23rd I counted three nests in a lane in less than a hundred yards. Greenfinches were very common, and there were about the usual numbers of Bullfinches and Linnets. In the autumn, a family of Hawfinches was frequently in evidence at Somersal, for the first time for many years. Robins, Wrens, Hedge-Sparrows and Tree-Sparrows were still not present in their usual numbers, and there seemed to be fewer Lapwings breeding. Starlings, Rooks and Jack-



MOOR-HEN KILLED AT SOMERSAL, AUGUST 25TH.

daws were abundant, and Carrion-Crows, Magpies and Jays more plentiful than ever. Great Tits and Blue Tits were very common indeed, and Marsh Tits quite up to their usual numbers, but Coal Tits and Long-tailed Tits were comparatively scarce, though one or more families of both species were often seen in the autumn and winter. Goldcrests were still conspicuous by their absence in the spring, but I saw a few in the winter. Tree-creepers were scarce. Kestrels were very plentiful and commoner than Sparrow-Hawks. Wood Pigeons were abundant in the early part of the year, and apparently more than usual stayed to breed. Yellow-Hammers and Reed-Buntings seemed as numerous as usual. Both at Somersal and Bakewell I saw Lesser-Redpoles. Addled eggs were very common this year, the Red Grouse, Willow-Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Tree-Pipit being noted in this connection.

On January 24th I heard the Song-Thrush for the first time of the year at Bakewell, and on the following day there were several in good song. The first Sky-lark was on February 23rd, and the first Chaffinch on the 27th of the same month. I did not hear a Blackbird till March 10th and they were not singing freely till some days afterwards. On March 17th the Lapwings were noisy and had begun to scratch at Somersal, and on the 31st seven eggs were picked up near Curbar (E. Peat). On March 18th I heard the Yellow-Hammer for the first time near Etwall, and on March 20th several Meadow-Pipits near Bakewell. On March 23rd a Dipper's nest in Lathkill Dale had three eggs. On April 4th I saw a Song-Thrush's nest at Somersal with three newly-hatched young ones. During the extremely mild weather in December Song-Thrushes were tempted to sing. Even at Bakewell I heard one in very good song for more than half-an-hour on December 6th, and at Repton on the 10th there was quite a chorus.

ARRIVAL OF SPRING MIGRANTS.—The Ring-Ouzel was in good time this year and nearly a month earlier than last season ; it was noted at Curbar on March 24th (E. Peat). On May 26th a nest in North Derbyshire had four eggs (C. H. Wells). The Wheatear was a fortnight earlier than last year, but still later than usual, and it was not at all common either at Bakewell (N.H.F.) or Hathersage (R. Chislett). It was first seen at Bakewell on April 1st, and near Somersal on the 17th (N.H.F.). The Chiffchaff was heard at Somersal on April 5th, 6th and 8th (N.H.F.). It was not heard this year at Hathersage (R.C.), or Bakewell (N.H.F.). The first Sandpiper was seen on the Dove near Doveridge, on April 12th, and on the 17th three were seen (N.H.F.). It was noted at Bakewell on May 5th (C.H.W.) ; on April 28th it was not to be seen on the Derwent, but on May 21st a nest was found with one egg (R.C.). The first Yellow Wagtail was seen on the banks of the Dove near Doveridge on April 17th, but there were no more for several days ; it was common at Bakewell on May 5th (N.H.F.). April 22nd was a glorious spring-day following on a spell of bitter cold, and the Willow-Warblers appeared like magic, singing everywhere, at Somersal ; they had reached their full numbers on the 26th (N.H.F.). They were seen at Sheepbridge on April 30th (C.H.W.), and were in great numbers at Hathersage on the 27th (R.C.). The Tree-Pipit was first heard near Somersal on the 23rd ; there were several on the 24th, and on the 26th they were in full strength. One had begun to sit on six eggs at Bakewell on May 20th. The Blackcap and Whitethroat both appeared at Somersal on April 24th (N.H.F.). Swallows were seen at or near Somersal on April 25th and 26th ; there were several in twos and threes on the 27th, but they were not common till the 30th (N.H.F.). They were noted in the Ewden Valley on April 26th (C.H.W.), and a few were seen at Hathersage on the 27th (R.C.).

They were common at Bakewell on May 3rd (N.H.F.). The Cuckoo was heard at Somersal on April 25th (N.H.F.), Curbar (E.P.) and the Ewden Valley (C.H.W.) on the 26th, and Hathersage on the 27th (R.C.). The Corn-crake was first heard at Somersal on April 26th, but I did not hear it myself till May 2nd. It was heard at Baslow on May 6th (C.H.W.). The Lesser Whitethroat was first heard near Somersal on April 27th and they were common on May 1st. On June 16th a family of young ones was seen out of the nest, being fed by the parent birds near Bakewell, where they were unusually common this year (N.H.F.). Three Sand-Martins were seen at Chellaston on April 13th (C.H.W.), and there were several at the Hanging Bridge, Ashbourne, on the 30th, while they were common at Bakewell on May 3rd (N.H.F.). One Martin was seen at Mappleton on April 30th, a few at Sudbury on May 3rd, and on this date there were several at Bakewell (N.H.F.). On May 2nd two Red-starts were seen at Somersal, and the nest was being built on May 12th (N.H.F.). On May 4th a Sedge-Warbler was heard at an osier-bed near Bakewell, and on May 26th there was a nest with six eggs (N.H.F.). The Swifts appeared at Derby on May 4th (C.H.W.); on May 5th two were seen at Bakewell and there were several on the next day (N.H.F.), but they were not observed at Sheffield till the 16th (C.H.W.). The Wood-Warbler was heard in Manners Wood and Lathkill Dale on May 6th, and on May 16th a nest was found near Bakewell with one egg (N.H.F.). A few Whinchats were seen near Bakewell on May 6th; on May 25th a nest was being built and there were three eggs on May 29th. Spotted Flycatchers were seen at Somersal (N.H.F.) and Clay Cross (C.H.W.) on May 11th. They were very common this year. On April 28th a Grasshopper-Warbler was heard "reeling" near Hathersage (R.C.), and it was also heard this year in Monsal Dale and North Derbyshire

(C.H.W.). I have no note of the arrival of the Garden-Warbler, but on May 27th there was a nest with five slightly incubated eggs near Bakewell. The Nightjar appeared at Curbar on May 16th (E.P.) ; young about five days old were seen on June 23rd (R.C.).

DEPARTURE OF MIGRANTS.—During the latter part of July and the beginning of August, Willow-Warblers were still singing hard at Somersal, but towards the middle of August they stopped singing. I heard one in good song on September 1st but not later, though a few were still left on the 16th. On August 31st and again on September 11th I heard the song of the Chiffchaff, and the call for the last time on September 14th. On August 26th I saw a Redstart for the last time. On September 9th I saw a pair of Turtle-Doves at Somersal, the first I have seen in the immediate neighbourhood. A few Flycatchers remained until September 12th, and on the 14th there were still some Whinchats. On September 7th I heard a Lesser Whitethroat for the last time, and on the 11th saw the last Whitethroat.

WINTER VISITORS.—I saw Fieldfares at Somersal on several occasions during April, not as a rule in large numbers, and on May 1st I saw a few for the last time. About thirty Fieldfares were seen at Chellaston on April 13th (C.H.W.). The first I heard in the autumn was on October 25th.

### CLASSIFIED NOTES.

Chaffinch, *Fringilla caelebs*.—On May 22nd I found a Chaffinch's nest at Somersal with five pure pale blue eggs, and later in the month another nest with eggs of the same type, but very slightly marked. Mr. C. H. Wells informs me that he has twice taken eggs of this type, in each case from the Dovedale district.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla boarula*.—On May 1st I noticed

a pair of Grey Wagtails building in a hole in the wall of the cowshed at Somersal. The nest was quite finished on May 11th, but if any eggs were laid they were taken and the birds were not seen after May 18th. I have never known a nest in the neighbourhood before, though the birds are sometimes seen in the autumn and winter.

Willow-Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochilus*.—On June 1st, in the Hathersage neighbourhood, Mr. R. Chislett found a Willow-Warbler's nest in a large box bush, eight feet from the ground. On June 5th I found one myself near Bakewell similarly placed in a bush but not quite so high.

Wood-Warbler, *Phylloscopus sibilaria*.—Always common in the Bakewell district, this attractive warbler was more abundant than usual this year, and was heard in several new spots. As the nest is usually considered difficult to find, it is perhaps worth mentioning that I found three this year without difficulty.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dryobates maior anglicus*.—On July 25th, but on this occasion only, a young bird was seen on the mulberry tree mentioned in the two former articles, when there were as yet no kernels to the nuts. On August 21st the female bird appeared for the first time. I had hoped to get a photograph of her at work on a nut, but she was far less regular in her visits than in former years, and owing to this and other difficulties, including the unfavourable weather, I was only able to get one snapshot, which was a failure. She continued to come for nuts with varying frequency, sometimes missing several days, up to the time of writing, late in December.

Long-eared Owl, *Asio otus*.—Mr. C. H. Wells remarks that the Long-eared Owl has nested this year in two localities on the northern border of the county, where he has not observed it previously. He suggests, as is probably the case, that this is due to the felling of woods in other districts, which has driven the birds from their

usual haunts. Certainly a wood near Bakewell, which used to be a favourite nesting-place for this species and the Sparrow-Hawk, has lately been cut down. On May 6th Mr. Wells saw four eggs slightly incubated in a Magpie's nest in a spruce fir. The birds originally laid in another nest in the same wood, but this was robbed. They thereupon appropriated the Magpie's new nest, driving off the owners, and laid their second clutch, which was probably successfully hatched. The dome of the Magpie's nest was retained and the nest lined with fir needles. This occurred just on the Yorkshire side of the border.

Little Owl, *Carine noctua*.—This species bred near Hassop this season (E. Peat). Though now common in some parts of the county, it is, I believe, new to that neighbourhood.

Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*.—Early in December an old bird of this species was unfortunately shot near Stoney-Middleton. It had been previously observed in the neighbourhood by Mr. E. Peat.

Merlin, *Falco aesalon*.—I have received from Mr. R. Chislett a most interesting account of the breeding of a pair of Merlins in the Hathersage district. They were kept under careful observation and there was no proof forthcoming of a single young Grouse having been killed by them, or indeed any other game, with the solitary exception of a young Snipe. Meadow-Pipits naturally figured most prominently in the list of victims, but in spite of this there was no appreciable diminution in their numbers, when the young Merlins flew on July 17th. If the parent birds had at any time been proved guilty of killing young Grouse, they would have been destroyed forthwith by the keepers, under whose direct observation they were breeding. In the notes for 1915 Capt. W. Shipton pleaded for more lenient treatment on behalf of the Merlin, and the above very good evidence in its favour



ought surely to have some weight with those game preservers (unfortunately the large majority) who still practise a policy of ruthless extermination in the case of this most interesting bird. One was seen near Buxton on July 16th (W. Shipton).

Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola*.—On March 25th a Woodcock was seen to fly over the tram lines in Sheffield and settle in the grounds of a large private house (C. H. Wells). Such an interesting event seems worthy of record, even though it occurred just outside the limits of the county.

Redshank, *Totanus totanus*.—This bird is rarely seen in North Derbyshire, but on July 19th one was seen at Chapel Reservoir being mobbed by Lapwings (W.S.). One was also seen on the moors near Curbar in August by Mr. E. Peat, the first he has ever seen there.

Curlew, *Numenius arquata*.—These birds were breeding quite in their usual numbers on the Derbyshire moors this year. On August 3rd six passed over Somersal flying south-south-west, and I heard the call on the following day and on August 7th.

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*.—There were about twenty nests in the neighbourhood of Curbar this year (E.P.). So far as I know, this is the first instance of the Black-headed Gull breeding in Derbyshire, and it is to be hoped they will return next year.

Little Auk, *Alle alle*.—On May 24th a Little Auk, in full summer plumage, was found in Egginton village and brought alive to the Rev. F. F. Key. Its appearance so far inland at this time of year is very remarkable.

Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*.—Allusion was made in the Report of 1915 to the presence of a pair of these birds on Chapel Reservoir. This year they bred, and on July 19th Capt. W. Shipton observed two well-grown young birds in addition to the parents. They may have bred before during the last three years, but for

three years previously he watched them and never saw any young.

Moor-Hen, *Gallinula chloropus*.—On August 25th a rough-haired terrier, who was out for a walk with me, caught a pied Moor-Hen near Somersal, a photograph of which is given with this article.

It only remains to express my best thanks to the few who have kindly contributed to these notes: the Rev. F. F. Key, Capt. W. Shipton, and Messrs. R. Chislett, E. Peat and C. H. Wells.

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