

On Rare Migrants to Derbyshire in 1904.

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DURING the spring of 1904 the southern part of Derbyshire was visited by the largest herd of wild swans of which we have any record. Curiously enough they did not belong to the larger and more commonly occurring species, the Whooper, *Cygnus musicus*, Bechst., but to the smaller Bewick's swan, *Cygnus bewicki*, Yarrell.

This bird has only been recorded three times previously from Derbyshire. In February, 1845, a herd of eleven was met with on the Trent, and two were shot (*Zoologist*, 1850, p. 2823). An adult male bird was killed on January 18th, 1864, on the Trent at Newton Solney by Mr. J. A. Smallwood, and is now in the Rolleston Hall collection (incorrectly labelled as having been killed in 1841). See the *Zoologist*, 1864, p. 8961. The third occurrence was in the winter of 1894-5, when a small herd of six birds visited the reservoir on Ramsley Moor in North Derbyshire, and two were shot by one of the keepers about the first week in January, 1895 (W. Storrs Fox).

On February 24th, 1904, about 9.30 a.m., a labourer saw two wild swans flying down the Dove valley from Mapleton to Hanging Bridge. They came within easy range, and appeared to settle by the river below Hanging Bridge. They were certainly wild swans from their notes, but whether *C. musicus* or *C. bewicki* it is impossible to say. Three days later (February 27th) I was standing in my garden about 4.15 p.m., when I heard in the distance the answering calls of an approaching

herd. A few flakes of snow were falling at the time, and when at last the birds came into view I saw that they were flying in an extended line, almost abreast of one another, and not in the V-shaped formation so frequently adopted by the geese. I counted forty of them as they passed right overhead, giving me a splendid view of their long outstretched necks and white plumage, with their black feet extended backwards. All the time they kept up a continuous succession of calls to one another, which were distinctly audible after the birds had passed out of sight.

It would be of much interest if the flight of this herd could be traced across England. There is some reason to believe that they visited a reservoir about ten miles from Birmingham, and after many enquiries I found that they were sighted at Calwich and Mayfield on their way up the Dove valley before swerving in a south-easterly direction over Clifton, Edlaston, Longford, across the Trent valley to Calke, and finally reaching Swithland Reservoir, in Leicestershire, where forty were counted on the 27th. Next day twenty-five birds left, but the remaining fifteen stayed on the reservoir till 9.0 a.m. on March 7th, when the Rev. J. Murray Dixon, hearing their cries, was in time to see them rise from the water in a string, and take a north-easterly direction.

Mr. O. Murray Dixon gave me some interesting details of their stay at Swithland. He had excellent opportunities of watching them through a powerful glass, and was able to determine the species with certainty. When disturbed the neck was erected to its full extent, and then nodded with a peculiar jerky motion. In bathing they dipped their necks into the water, allowing it to flow over their backs in a most graceful manner.

After leaving Swithland they appear to have again passed over Calke Abbey, for a herd (estimated at eighteen in number) were seen at midday "about a week" after the passage of the main body, and it is possible that the two separated portions may have re-united, as Mr. G. Pullen informs me that thirty-five swans were seen flying over the sewage farm at

Egginton on March 29th, while on the following day twenty-two grey geese (sp.?) were seen at the same place.

A female Wood or Summer Duck, *Aix sponsa* (L.), was killed on the Derwent near Duffield by Mr. Young at the end of January. This is an American species, but has been kept in a semi-domesticated state in the county, and the bird was almost certainly one of these.

A couple of Scaup Ducks, *Fuligula marila* (L.), were seen on the Trent not far from Donington, and the male bird was shot by Mr. A. S. Hutchinson. These birds are rather rare visitors to us, and none have been recorded since 1891.

Nightingales were more numerous than usual along our southern borders, and several instances of their breeding were noted in 1904 along the Staffordshire boundary and in the south of the county.

A very fine Honey Buzzard, *Pernis apivorus* (L.), was, I regret to say, shot at Allestree by a keeper on June 23rd. It was in splendid plumage, and though the sex was not ascertained by dissection, was probably a female. From the earth on the claws it had evidently been lately at work scratching out a wasps' nest. It is, of course, a protected bird, but so long as all large hawks are shot on sight by gamekeepers, the so-called protection is not of much practical value. The Honey Buzzard is, moreover, not only harmless, but actively useful; its main food consisting of the grubs of wasps.

An Oyster-Catcher, *Hematopus ostralegus* (L.), was seen by Mr. H. G. Tomlinson on the River Dove near Sudbury on October 28th, and on November 4th Mr. R. H. Bond shot an adult male Scoter, *Oldemia nigra* (L.), on the Dove, near Hanging Bridge. It was in poor condition, and was very loath to take wing.