

## Ornithological Notes from Derbyshire for the Year 1906.

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ON January 19th Mr. G. M. Bond saw a drake Scoter, *Oedemia nigra* (L.), fly over the road between Ashburne and Hanging Bridge as he was driving home from Ashburne. It was so close to him that he had every opportunity of identifying it, and he is, moreover, familiar with the appearance of the bird, having in his possession another drake which was shot within a mile of the spot on November 4th, 1904.

Mr. J. Henderson came across a very large flock of Redpolls on January 29th in the Dove Valley, near Okeover—at least a hundred in number. The weather was mild, and the Thrushes, Mistle Thrushes and Hedge Sparrows could be heard singing in all directions. On February 8th the hedgerows near Osmaston were covered with Fieldfares in the morning, and in the afternoon great flocks passed over Clifton in a westerly direction. Next day we had about four inches of snow, which, however, did not stay long.

Hérons have been much more numerous during the last year or two in the Dove and Manifold Valleys. It is quite a common thing to see five or six on the wing at the same time, and as they were reported to be nesting in a wood not far off, I walked up the river on February 20th to the place, and again later in the year, but could find no trace of nests, and am inclined to think that they come across the hills from the Churnet Valley, where a small heronry has been established of late years.

At Mapleton a remarkably early Blackbird's nest in a laurel hedge contained young birds on March 6th.

On March 10th Mr. A. S. Hutchinson received a cock Blackbird, which had been killed near Derby. The plumage was entirely of a pale cinnamon colour, with a few lighter feathers under the chin. On the 19th I picked up a fresh Wild Duck's egg in a small swamp not far from Dovedale, from which I had flushed several duck. On the same afternoon while walking with Mr. J. Henderson by the river Dove we noticed a *Phylloscopus* on the opposite side, about twelve yards away. The wind was cold and the bird kept low down beneath the shelter of the bank, and did not utter a note, but after a careful examination through the Goerz glass, we came to the conclusion that it must be a Chiff-Chaff, *P. rufus* (Bechst), the feet being too dark for the Willow Warbler. The early arrival is the more remarkable as since the summer of 1903 the Chiff Chaff has entirely deserted the upper Dove valley, where it was formerly common. Subsequently, however, we found breeding pairs established at Norbury and Offcote, so that it appears to be gradually re-colonizing the district. With the exception of this solitary individual, no *Phylloscopi* were seen till April 2nd, when Mr. Henderson reported the arrival of a second, probably also a Chiff Chaff. A fine old elm tree not far from Ashburne has been occupied by a pair of Brown Owls and two or three pairs of Jackdaws for many years past. On climbing to the hole and looking in, I saw the owl sitting quietly on the nest. As she flew off she disclosed two eggs, which appeared to be much incubated (March 20th). There were no dead mice or birds in the nest.

On March 26th we noticed some eight or ten Wheatears on a ploughed field in the Dove valley, about three and a half miles from Dovedale. Now the Wheatear is a common summer visitor to Thorpe Cloud, Bunster, and the whole upland country to the northward, but curiously enough, although it probably follows the course of the Dove valley in order to reach its breeding haunts, I have never met with it on passage in the

low-lying pastures of the lower Dove valley until the present year. For the next three or four days we noticed several small parties of these birds in the same field, and once in another ploughed field on the opposite side of the road, but nowhere else.

On the 28th three Wild Swans were seen by a local farmer, near the Dove, and on April 2nd a small herd of five birds came flying down the Henmore valley. Two of them pitched in the river Dove below Birdsgrove, the other three flew on towards Calwich. Mr. J. Henderson, who was the first to notice them, thought they were Whoopers, *Cygnus musicus* (Bechst.), and after examining two through the glass, I came to the same conclusion. Unfortunately they were driven off by a man who mistook them for ordinary Mute Swans, and set out to capture them with a landing net and some sopped bread! It is almost unnecessary to add that the swans did not await his arrival, but took wing while he was still some distance away.

On April 7th we noticed the arrival of a party of six Sand Martins at a quarry on Cannock Chase, and the same evening three more were seen at Clifton. During the latter half of April and the early part of May I was on the Continent, and on my return found that all the summer migrants had arrived, and nesting was in full swing. On the whole, the spring was decidedly late and everything very backward, but the summer was wonderfully fine and hot, and the rainfall much below the average.

Thanks to the provision of nesting boxes affixed to the trees, Great Tits have increased in numbers in my own garden, and this year we had four boxes occupied by them, from which over thirty young were reared.

While returning from looking at a Snipe's nest with two eggs on May 28th, we flushed a Tree Pipit from a nest with four eggs, in the evening. For quite six or seven yards she tumbled along the ground, looking in the dusk more like a frog than a bird, till at last she took wing. I have seen a

Tree Pipit run a yard or so from the nest occasionally, when taken by surprise, but never quite like this. Another Tree Pipit's nest in a railway cutting contained a fine olive brown Cuckoo's egg in addition to four red-spotted eggs of the Pipit (May 30th). On the way home we surprised a Stoat in the act of killing a rabbit in the usual way, paralyzing it by a bite at the back of the head.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker seems to have been driven away from the Ramsor woods by the extensive felling that has been carried on there, and a careful search on May 31st failed to show any signs of birds or new nest holes. Underneath a Kestrel's nest lay a dead hen Kestrel, which had obviously been shot as she flew from her eggs. On June 4th I climbed to another Kestrel's nest in a Magpie's nest at the top of a tall larch. Earlier in the season the local keeper had shot both Magpies from this nest, and a few days before my visit I was informed that he had managed to kill both Kestrels. In the nest were four eggs, cold and wet. The thorny roof of the nest was still in place, but the lining of roots had been ejected by the hawks.

In some open sheds at the Dog and Partridge Inn, Thorpe, several pairs of House Martins were nesting on the beams *inside* the roofing, instead of affixing their nests to the outside walls, as is usually the habit of this species. The entrance to these nests was at the side, unlike the open nests built by the Swallow.

The warm summer must have been favourable to bird life on the whole, as the clutches were in many cases larger than usual. Thus a nest of the Greenfinch found on June 9th contained seven eggs; one of the Thrush had six (the only one I have ever met with, although I have examined many hundreds), while two Blackbirds' nests with six eggs were reported to me—one from Egginton (Rev. F. F. Key), and one from Clifton. However, the most extraordinary case occurred at Osmaston, where the Tufted Ducks are common, and breed on the islets in the ponds. On one of these islets, covered

with rhododendrons, were three nests. The first contained two eggs, the second ten (both apparently forsaken), while the third held no fewer than twenty-eight eggs! On looking closely at them, however, it was evident that they were the produce of three or more ducks. Eight eggs were dark brownish and very distinct, while the others, though more alike, showed at least two types. A duck was on the nest, or rather heap of eggs, when found, but it is needless to say that the bulk of them were quite cold. There are now two pairs of Great Crested Grebes on the ponds at Osmaston; one pair had three young (almost as big as their parents) with them on June 13th. On the same day I had a good view of a fine drake Pochard, which was strong on the wing, so that it is quite possible that this species may have bred with us. On July 19th Mr. G. Pullen found an addled egg of the Nightjar on Breadsall Moor, where the birds have been common this year.

At Rocester station on July 20th I heard the cries of young birds from an iron crane, and a minute's search disclosed a brood of young Great Tits in a hollow part of the crane to which the old birds obtained access through a chain hole. Perhaps this may have been a second brood, though all the evidence has hitherto seemed to point to the Great Tit being single brooded.

Canon Molineux writes from Staveley to say that an Egyptian Goose was shot this spring on a pool not far away, and that the Stock Dove still breeds in the district.

Most of our local Swifts had disappeared by the middle of August, but five or six were flying over the lake at Calwich on August 16th, and two more were seen by the river Dove on August 18th by Mr. Henderson.

Mr. W. Storrs Fox noticed a Chiff Chaff singing in his garden at Bakewell on September 14th, rather a late date for this species, although in 1902 I heard it as late as October 2nd at Clifton. The record is the more remarkable as the bird is so very uncommon in the Bakewell district.

Swallows and Martins were present in their usual numbers

in the Dove valley till about October 11th-12th, although previous to that date large passages of migrants from further north had taken place.

Two correspondents from the Bakewell district (Messrs. W. Storrs Fox and W. Boulsover) remark on the unusually large number of Yellow Wagtails, *Motacilla flava raii*, seen during the past season. The Tufted Duck appears to be well established as a breeding species in the Bakewell district.

On October 12th a dead Redwing was picked up at Bakewell (W. Boulsover), and on the 29th a flock of about fifty or sixty Fieldfares passed over Clifton, flying westward.

On the afternoon of November 5th, Mr. Alfred G. Tomlinson found a Little Owl, *Athene noctua* (Scop.), sitting in a privet bush in the wood close to Mr. H. G. Tomlinson's house at Burton-on-Trent. It allowed both gentlemen to approach within four yards and to watch it for ten minutes before taking wing. Only one definite occurrence of this bird in the county is on record: one having been caught in or near Derby in 1843. The late Lord Lilford turned many of these birds down in the neighbourhood of Lilford Hall, near Oundle, and they have now become well established and breed commonly in Northamptonshire, while of late years numerous occurrences have been reported from the adjoining counties, so that its appearance in the south of the county is not altogether unexpected.