

Ornithological Notes from Derbyshire for the year 1907.

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THE year 1907 opened with the whole country side deep in the heavy snow of the previous Christmas. Even in the low-lying parts of the Dove valley the roadside drifts were in places five and six feet deep, and near Leek a woman was frozen to death in a blinding snow-storm not far from her own house. The thaw began on January 1st, and the snow wasted rapidly, and by January 3rd most of it was gone. On January 9th the weather was mild and fine, Mistle Thrushes were singing in the fields, and at night the Brown Owls were very noisy. Towards the end of January a fine female otter, 44 inches in length, was trapped on the Dove near Okeover by J. Smedley, the water bailiff of the Okeover Fishing Club. The weather again turned very cold on the 22nd, the barometer standing at 31.40; and on the night of the 24th 22 degrees of frost were registered. Many Fieldfares were about, but almost all the small birds disappeared, and the Dove valley was almost destitute of bird life, with the exception of the Rooks and Waterhens. Mr. W. Storrs Fox writes that on January 27th he saw six Coots on Ashford Lake, as well as two Pochards and eleven drakes of the Tufted Duck. He had not previously noticed Coots here, and had only seen one Pochard before. About twelve couples of Tufted Ducks bred here in 1906.

On February 1st, while motoring near Bradbourne, a

Great Grey Shrike, *Lanius excubitor* L., got up from the hedgerow and flew in front of the car with a weak flight, not gaining on the car at all. It settled on some isolated thorn bushes in a field, but though I went after it, I was unable to get near it again.

On the afternoon of February 6th, while walking from Clifton to Mayfield, I saw three Swans flying up the Dove valley towards me. I had a good view of them as they passed me, about 30 feet high, and believe them to have been Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus bewicki* Yarr. They uttered no note, but were certainly Wild Swans, as they had no knob on the bill, and looked too small for Whoopers. On the evening of February 9th, about 9 p.m., there was a fine display of *Aurora Borealis*.

On February 13th, at Osmaston, I found that a Kestrel had been haunting the Pheasant pens for some time past, in order to take toll of the numerous small birds attracted by the Pheasant food. One hen Pheasant in the pens has partially assumed the plumage of the cock. There is also a handsomely pied specimen of the Blackbird about, and to-day the head-keeper saw a Water Rail and a Kingfisher near Shirley Mill. Put up a Woodcock on the way home. Under the same date Mr. W. Boulsover reports a Rough-legged Buzzard seen at Ashford-in-the-Water. On February 23rd, a very cold and winterly afternoon, I walked down the river to Calwich. Large numbers of Waterhens were feeding on the patches of grass from which the snow had disappeared, and in places the ground was black with them. I counted forty-seven in one flock, and there could not have been fewer than sixty-five or seventy altogether.

The Wild Ducks began to lay on February 24th, and several nests had eggs by the first week in March. A very large flock of Redwings were seen near Bakewell, flying south, on March 7th (W. Boulsover). On March 26th the Rev. W. K. Martin saw two Wheatears in Dovedale, above the Lovers' Leap, while Mr. R. Hall noticed one in Chatsworth Park on March 29th, and they were closely followed by the Chiff-chaff, which was heard at Burton on March 28th (H. G. Tomlinson), and in

Manners Wood, Bakewell, on April 3rd (R. Hall). Early on the morning of April 1st I saw about eight Sand Martins hawking about, near the nesting colony at Clifton Station; on the same day they were noticed at Burton (H. G. Tomlinson), and several were seen on the Derwent by Mr. Hall on the 5th. The other April migrants arrived somewhat irregularly, but Mr. Hall reports Willow Warbler on the 17th, Yellow Wagtail and Tree Pipit on the 19th, Swallow on the 20th, House Martin 23rd, Sandpiper 24th (a pair in Belwell Park), and Redstart on 25th, while Mr. Tomlinson noticed the Cuckoo on April 25th. On the other hand, Mr. Hall does not record the Cuckoo till May 6th in the Bakewell district, and no House Martins were seen at Burton till May 5th! or Swallows till April 30th, so that it is clear that it was some time before the distribution of these species was general. The Swift, however, was as punctual as ever: May 4th, Burton (H. G. Tomlinson); May 6th, five seen at Bakewell (R. Hall). Other May migrants were the Blackcap, May 5th, Stanton (W. M. Tomlinson); Sedge Warbler, May 6th, Burton (H. G. T.); Whitethroat, 8th, Burton (H. G. T.); Garden Warblers singing, 9th, Clifton (F. C. R. J.); Wood Wren, 10th, Bakewell (R. H.); Corncrake, 10th, Bakewell (R. H.); Whinchat, 11th, Norbury (F. C. R. J.); Lesser White-throat, 12th, Clifton (F. C. R. J.); Spotted Flycatcher, 12th, Clifton (F. C. R. J.). The first arrival of the Turtle Dove appears not to have been exactly noted. On May 3rd, while walking up the Henmore brook, I saw two Dippers' nests built side by side. The young had already flown from one nest, but the other was new and ready for eggs. This bird frequently rears two broods in succession from the same nest. The same afternoon I found a Grey Wagtail's nest, upon which the hen was sitting, but it contained young birds at least a week old, so that the eggs must have been laid before the middle of March, quite a fortnight earlier than the usual laying time in this district. A nest of the Tawny Owl in a hollow oak, examined on May 11th, contained only a single young bird, with quills showing through the down on wings and tail. A Wheatear's egg found at

Stanton by the Rev. W. M. Tomlinson on May 15th was distinctly marked with fine brown spots. A Grey Wagtail, whose first clutch of five eggs had been destroyed, built another nest on the opposite side of the stream and laid six eggs, the only instance I have known of this number in South Derbyshire, although it is not uncommon in some districts.

Yellow Wagtails were remarkably plentiful in the Dove valley this year, although several nests were destroyed by the heavy rains, which converted some of the low-lying meadows into swamps. On May 18th, while out nesting with Mr. R. H. Read, we came across a Tawny Owl in a hole in an alder stump, the entrance being about 4 feet 6 inches from the ground. As she seemed unwilling to leave, I put my hand down the opening and lifted her out by the wings. She did not make any resistance, but flew quietly away on being released. A Sparrowhawk's nest at Stanton, which contained five incubated eggs on May 23rd, was placed in rather an unusual position, about 48 feet up an oak, at a place where the main stem forked into three branches. As the tree was only just beginning to come into leaf, the nest was extremely conspicuous, and the sitting bird could easily be seen on the nest from the hillside. Most of the nests in this district are built in conifers, usually in spruces. Mr. W. Boulsover saw a pair of Blackheaded Gulls feeding on the Recreation Ground at Bakewell on May 23rd, and on the following day saw a flock of nine birds on Calton pastures—an unusual date for this species. On May 28th I came across a nest on a railway embankment with five pale blue eggs, quite unmarked. The parent bird was not on the nest, and the eggs were obviously hard-set, so I did not take them, but on June 2nd I was astonished to see a Tree Pipit leave the nest. In order to make absolutely certain, I watched the bird on again, and examined it closely from within a yard or two. Out of many hundreds of these eggs seen in different collections, I have never come across a set at all like this, although the Meadow Pipit occasionally lays eggs of a bluish colour with faint markings. A Great Whitethroat's nest found on the 29th

contained the unusual number of six eggs, and on June 3rd I watched two Wood Wrens on to their nests, each of which contained the normal clutch of six eggs. On the way back through the Stanton Woods a Redstart flew from a hole in a mossy bank at the foot of an old stump, and a minute's search resulted in the discovery of a nest with six fresh eggs, placed some inches underground. On June 5th Mr. F. H. Sikes showed me some interesting eggs taken near Rocester, including a set of Grasshopper Warbler's eggs taken on May 29th, a very handsome clutch of six Tree Sparrow's eggs from a pollarded willow, with dark chestnut caps at the big ends, nests of Lesser Redpoll, Chiff-chaff, etc. Three days later I came across a pretty nest of Lesser Redpoll in a hedge in Norbury, with six fresh eggs.

A decided increase has taken place in the breeding range of the Tufted Duck during the past two years in this district. It has bred for many years past in some numbers at Osmaston and Yeldersley, and in 1906 a couple at least were noticed on the lake at Calwich Abbey. This year there are at least five couples there, and I believe also two more couples on the new pond at Norbury made by Captain H. E. Clowes. On June 11th I visited Marston-on-Dove and Egginton with the Rev. F. F. Key. Wonderful to relate, it did not rain all day, but we found that the late heavy rains had caused the water to rise so much that a flourishing colony of Dabchicks' nests had been completely submerged. A Wood Pigeon had placed its nest in an unusual site—among the boughs of an old pollarded willow and resting on the stump, only 4 feet 6 inches from the ground, in a hedgerow at the edge of a wood. Mr. G. Pullen found Nightjars breeding on Breadsall Moor this year, and picked up an egg on the 9th. On June 13th I saw two half-grown young badgers at Osmaston, which had been taken from an earth in Shirley Park. Two pairs of Great Crested Grebes were nesting on the ponds: one pair had large young, but the nest of the other pair had only two eggs, on which the old bird was sitting in a very conspicuous position, so that she was easily visible from the opposite shore of the pond. Mr. E. Fitzherbert Wright also informs me that another pair bred this year for the first time at Yeldersley.

At Sudbury Mr. J. Bottrell showed me the Little Auk which he picked up dead on the ice of Sudbury Pond on November 29th, 1904. Mr. Tarrant, the keeper, also has a Hobby, which he shot there in June, 1906. Great Crested Grebes were also breeding here, and one bird could be seen sitting on its nest on June 20th. Reed Warblers were not uncommon by the side of the pond, and in one bush overhanging the water was a nest with six eggs, slightly incubated. This is a very unusual number for the Reed Warbler, which seldom lays more than four eggs. Some pieces of virgin cork fastened over crevices in a birch tree in my garden attracted a pair of Tree Creepers, and on June 28th the young were hatched.

On July 6th I received a note from Mr. G. Pullen stating that he had found a Stonechat's nest with five eggs, and had watched the parent birds for some time through x-8 prismatic glasses. This bird is now so scarce in Derbyshire that this record is of the greatest interest. Mr. F. H. Sikes informed me that he came across another Grasshopper Warbler's nest with six eggs while visiting Beeston Tor, in the Manifold Valley, on June 2nd. Owing to the extraordinarily wet weather, the season for game birds proved to be an exceedingly bad one, and very few of the early Partridges' nests hatched off. Mr. Pullen picked up a dead chick, not more than three or four days old, on July 28th.

A flock of fifteen gulls, probably Lesser Black-backed or possibly Herring Gulls, flew over Clifton on August 11th. The Swifts made a much longer stay than usual, and did not leave the Ashburne district till August 24th, while a straggler (or perhaps two birds) was noticed twice on August 31st (J. Henderson). The autumn song of the Chiff-chaff was noted on September 2nd, 3rd, 10th, 21st, 22nd, and 24th. From the 7th to the 21st of September the weather was continuously fine, with little wind, and on the 20th enormous numbers of aphides appeared, so that the air was full of them. On the 21st a breeze got up and the sky became leaden-coloured. Black clouds were driven by the breeze down the valley, and at 4.30

p.m. it was almost dark, but no rain fell, and when the wind dropped the aphides had temporarily disappeared, although they continued to be troublesome at times until the weather turned cold.

Young House Martins were still being fed in the nests by their parents at Hanging Bridge on October 2nd, and Mr. Henderson saw four young Great Crested Grebes on October 6th on the lower pond at Osmaston, which were still in down, and looked little larger than Dabchicks. A flock of about thirty House Martins passed over Clifton on the afternoon of October 20th.

An anomaly in our Bird Protection laws deserves to be pointed out. The eggs of the Goldfinch are protected by a County Council order throughout the county, and very justly, as the bird is not only harmless, but does much active good by the destruction of harmful seeds. Yet it is possible for professional birdcatchers to capture the whole of the Goldfinches of a district by means of thistledown spread as a bait on clap-nets, with one or two call-birds to attract the passing flocks, *after August 12th*. Lest it should be thought that this is an imaginary danger, I may add that I have actually seen this done in my own neighbourhood during the past season, and was powerless to do anything to stop it on weekdays (it is illegal on Sundays) except by inducing the owners of the land to threaten proceedings for trespass. It is to be hoped that the members of the Society will use their influence to get this anomalous state of things altered before next season, for what is the use of protecting the eggs of a bird merely to afford a richer harvest of miserable captives to the birdcatcher later in the season?