

Ornithological Record for Derbyshire, 1916.

By N. H. FITZ HERBERT.

OWING to the absence on active service of Mr. W. Shipton, I have been asked to undertake the annual ornithological report, and in presenting a very imperfect record for the year 1916, I feel I ought to give some explanation. I realise I am by no means competent under the best of conditions to do a work of this sort properly, and I only do so at a time of such difficulty as the present, because I think it is better that the record should be kept up, however inadequately, rather than that it should lapse. My difficulties this year were increased by the fact that I was not asked to undertake the task until after the arrival of the spring migrants, and consequently did not make so many notes as I should otherwise have done. Another year I shall hope to do better. In nomenclature and classification I have throughout followed the List of British Birds compiled by a committee of the B.O.U. 1915.

There was very heavy snow at intervals in the whole county from about March 12th to the end of the month. On the high ground it lay for weeks and there were huge drifts. The blizzard on March 28th was of almost unprecedented fury. Mr. E. Grindey reports that on March 12th, 13th and 14th immense flocks of Plover, Larks, Rooks and Starlings hung about at the foot of the Dove-dale hills where the snow had melted; the Plover made several efforts to get to their breeding grounds, only to return to the starting point, evidently disliking the conditions in the north. Later in the month he records that,

owing to the recent heavy snow, Grouse resorted to the farm-yards on various parts of the moorlands of North Derbyshire, where they were rendered so tame by hunger that in certain cases they allowed themselves to be handled like chickens. During the autumn, the weather was stormy, but extraordinarily mild.

ARRIVAL OF SPRING MIGRANTS.—Unfortunately I have no record of the arrival of several of the summer visitors. In addition to those mentioned below with exact dates, I noted at Somersal, before the end of April, the Tree Pipit, Whinchat, Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Cuckoo, Swift, House Martin and Yellow Wagtail. The Wheatear was seen at Lathkill Dale on March 27th (N.H.F.) and on April 4th at Thorpe, where it was very plentiful on the 7th (E. Grindey). The first Willow Warbler was noticed at Somersal on April 9th, but they were not common till several days later (N.H.F.). The Chiff Chaff was heard at Thorpe Mill on April 17th (E.G.). The Swallow was first seen at Somersal on April 19th (N.H.F.) and at Thorpe on April 23rd (E.G.). The Cuckoo was heard at Thorpe for the first time on April 24th, and the first Swift was seen on the same day (E.G.). The Corncrake and Lesser Whitethroat were heard at Tissington on April 28th (E.G.).

Next year, if I am able to continue this work, I hope I shall be able to make much more comprehensive notes myself, but I shall be very grateful for notes from anyone interested in the subject.

DEPARTURE OF MIGRANTS.—At Somersal a family of Lesser Whitethroats haunted the garden till after the end of August, and I saw and heard Willow Warblers up to September 8th, but most had gone long before. Nearly all the Spotted Flycatchers, which were very common this year, had gone before I left for Bakewell on September 15th, but a few still remained and I saw two the day before my departure. The Swifts left Bake-

well about August 12th, but on September 6th Mr. T. Clark saw four flying about over the river; they were not merely passing over. The Swallows and House Martins had for the most part gone before the end of September, but at the beginning of October a fair number still remained. On October 7th in the early morning I saw several Swallows, chiefly young ones, flying round S. Anselm's, and others similarly employed on October 16th and 17th, but they did not stay for long and I imagine they were merely resting on their way south. Mr. Grindey informs me that no Swallows or Martins were seen at Thorpe after October 15th, but on the 12th a pair of House Martins were feeding fledged young under the eaves of a house in the village. At Somersal no Swallows were seen after the end of September, but on October 2nd a number of House Martins were observed resting on migration, and on October 4th two stragglers were seen. I may here mention that of late years at Somersal, House Martins have been much more numerous than Swallows whereas formerly the opposite was the case.

With regard to the winter visitors, Mr. Grindey writes on October 20th that "Redwings have been everywhere in the hedgerows for the past week and I saw the first flock of Fieldfares on the 18th flying west and their call notes can be heard frequently as they pass overhead in the darkness."

CLASSIFIED NOTES.

Magpie, *Pica pica*.—In April I found a nest in a Scotch fir near Somersal with no dome; from above there was a clear view right into the nest.

Chaffinch, *Fringilla caelebs*.—On February 10th a Chaffinch was heard singing his spring song in a sunny sheltered position; the song was heard again on the 14th, probably uttered by the same bird.—(E. Grindey).

Linnet, *Acanthis cannabina*.—A pure white bird of this species was seen by Mr. E. Peat near Grouse Inn on Froggatt Edge in August.

Lesser Redpoll, *Acanthis linaria cabaret*.—This bird nests regularly in the Bakewell district. I found a nest this year in a young alder several feet from the ground. The two birds exhibited extraordinary uneasiness as I climbed up, and flew round and settled quite close, scolding furiously. I was surprised to find when I reached the nest that there were no eggs and that it was not even finished. The boldness of this species when sitting is proverbial, but I was not prepared for such devotion to an unfinished nest.

Twite, *Acanthis flavirostris*.—A few pairs are breeding annually on Ludworth Moor, and they are not uncommon on the Charlesworth and Chesworth Moors in North Derbyshire.—(E.G.).

Crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra*.—On December 12th, 1915, Mr. Grindey observed some Crossbills in the Cottage Wood at Mappleton; they were very intent on the fir cones and allowed him to watch them closely.

Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla lugubris*.—A very large flock of these birds passed over Thorpe northward bound on April 8th.—(E.G.).

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla boarula*.—On September 6th I saw two grey Wagtails in the garden at Somersal; neither this species nor the Yellow Wagtail is at all common in the neighbourhood.

Long-tailed Titmouse, *Aegithalus caudatus roseus*.—This charming little bird was much commoner than usual at Somersal this year and there were several nests in the neighbourhood.

Song Thrush, *Turdus musicus clarkii*.—Mrs. Milner of Totley Hall sends an interesting account of an albino Song Thrush, which was hatched in a creeper on the walls of her house. There were three young ones, which left the

nest before they were able to fly, and the white bird, after falling on to the lawn, was put into a cage, where the mother fed it through the bars for about a fortnight. When she stopped, it was fed on hard boiled egg and bread and milk, but it never thrived and died in about six weeks. Its feathers were pure white except under one wing, where a few brown feathers showed when it raised the wing.

Redbreast, *Erithacus rubecula melophilus*.—In a nest of this species in the garden of Somersal Hall the eggs were quite round and white; though the nest was well hidden, the unusual colour must have attracted the eye of a marauding bird, as the eggs were taken just after she had begun to sit.

Stonechat, *Saxicola rubicola*.—A pair are nesting annually at Crowden and three pairs at Woodhead—(E.G.). I saw a cock on the moor at Curbar in July.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dryobates maior anglicus*.—During the last few days of August I had noticed a tapping in the garden of Somersal Hall, but had been unable to locate it exactly or find out what caused it. On September 1st I saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker fly across the garden and later in the day found several nutshells underneath a small mulberry tree, most of them neatly split in half. On examining the tree itself, I found a nut wedged in a hole in the trunk and split but not eaten. Luckily it could be easily watched, and in the evening I saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker fly to the tree and eat the nut. The bird was a female and for the next few days I watched her several times a day. She would fly to the tree holding a nut in her beak by the stalk, place it in the hole, arrange it with her beak very dexterously, and then crack it with a few deft strokes and devour the kernel, the whole performance not taking much more than a minute. I used to put nuts in the hole for her, and as a rule she would drop her own and eat mine, but once

when she had brought a Kentish cob, she turned out mine and put her own in. She would never pick up nuts from the ground or from a table close by where I placed several. I once watched her eat a nut I had put in the hole and then three more, which she brought herself, in quick succession. She ate an extraordinary number of nuts, nearly all of them in the same hole in the mulberry tree. About a week after I first saw her she disappeared and was not seen again.

Mr. Grindey reports that a few pairs are breeding in the Goyt Valley.

Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*.—On August 4th and again on the following day, Mr. Grindey saw an adult Cuckoo feeding on the top of the fallen grass in a recently mown field; it was apparently eating insects, sometimes taking them in the air a foot or so above the ground, after the manner of a Flycatcher. In a field near Bakewell I found two eggs, evidently laid by the same bird, each in the nest of a Meadow-Pipit; in the same field, quite close at hand, was a Yellow Wagtail's nest, but this bird had not been victimised.

Tawny Owl, *Strix aluco*.—It may perhaps be of interest to record that a pair of these birds has nested for the last seven years in the garden of Somersal Hall or just outside. Five times they have used the same hole in an elm quite close to the house, but in 1912 a squirrel took possession of the hole and brought out a family, and in 1916, though the old hole was untenanted, the owls retired to an oak about a hundred yards from the house. The young ones usually leave the nest before they can fly properly and some of them in consequence have come to an untimely end. While the female is sitting, the male may always be seen sitting in some Austrian pines during the daytime. In the autumn the parents seem to conduct their young ones in the direction of Eaton Wood. Ever since 1910, during the spring and summer,

food consisting of rats, mice, weasels, stoats, shrews, birds and little rabbits has been put on an apple branch and has been taken regularly. The earliest date for the appearance of the young ones outside the nest is May 6th in 1910 and 1915.

Hen-Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*.—Mr. E. Peat informs me that on October 16th he saw two Hen-Harriers on Leash Fen; he had a good view of one of them in the morning with glasses, and in the afternoon a better view of the other, which perched on a post about two hundred yards away; he is sure that they were different birds.

Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*.—On July 2nd twelve of these birds were observed near the stepping stones at Dovedale, all hovering and circling about in a group; so closely were they packed at times that they could almost have been covered with a large table cloth—(E.G.).

Common Teal, *Querquedula crecca*.—A few are nesting annually on the river Etherow at Compstall. On August 22nd three males were observed at Thorpe flying north—(E.G.).

Shoveler, *Spatula clypeata*.—One of these birds was shot on September 6th not very far from Bakewell, but I am not at liberty to disclose the exact place.

Redshank, *Totanus totanus*.—One was seen on September 6th on the top of Axe-edge near Buxton—(E.G.).

Green Sandpiper, *Totanus ochropus*.—One of this species was seen on October 19th on the Dove Banks near the Izaak Walton Hotel; it is the first specimen observed in this locality.—(E.G.).

Curlew, *Numenius arquata*.—Curlews were noted passing over Thorpe on March 12th, 16th and 19th, and on April 1st—(E.G.).

Golden Plover, *Charadrius apricarius*.—On March 25th a flock of twenty passed over Thorpe flying rather low against the breeze; on April 8th a pair were seen—(E.G.).

Gulls. A Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) was noted

at Thorpe flying east on March 22nd, three of the same species flying west on April 19th, and two over the river Dove on July 28th. Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus affinis*) passed over Thorpe on April 30th, another on June 18th, and eleven on July 19th. On March 26th five Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) were observed flying north-west, and on April 13th eleven flying north over the Dove. On March 23rd a Gull passed over too high for the species to be determined, and on September 3rd a flock of about fifty Gulls was seen, these also being at too great a height to be identified—(E.G.).

Black Grouse, *Lyrurus tetrrix britannicus*.—A few are breeding annually near Fernilea in the Goyt Valley—(E.G.).

My thanks are due to Mrs. Milner and Mr. E. Peat, who have kindly contributed notes to this record, and more particularly to Mr. W. Storrs Fox, for much valuable help and advice, and Mr. E. Grindey, who has taken infinite trouble to help me.
