

Ornithological Notes for Derbyshire, 1923.

By N. H. FITZHERBERT.

JANUARY was a very mild month this year, and during the whole of it there was a fine chorus of Song-Thrushes, to which a few Missel-Thrushes occasionally added their voice. On February 3rd, a lovely fresh morning, I heard the first Chaffinch singing at Darley Dale, but towards the middle of the month there was a heavy fall of snow, which did not disappear till the 25th, when the Blackbirds, encouraged by the welcome change of weather, began to sing. The week ending March 25th was a glorious foretaste of spring and brought the Wheatears to their breeding grounds rather earlier than usual. At the beginning of April the year was still well forward; but the cold east winds kept back the migrants; however, on the 7th I saw an early Swallow at Somersal. The few days following the 11th were warmer and brought the Chiffchaff, Willow-Warbler, Redstart, Tree-Pipit, Martin and Sand-Martin. During the latter part of the month, the cold north-east winds kept back migrants in spite of the bright sun, and on the 23rd and the following day there were very severe frosts. The 26th was warmer, and the 27th a real spring day; and the remaining migrants soon appeared.

The winter was early; on November 30th there were 24 degrees of frost at Darley Dale, and, though there were mild intervals, the weather continued for the most part cold right up to the end of the year. Under these circumstances, Song-Thrushes were naturally silent, and

Robins and Hedge-Sparrows, with an occasional Wren, were the only songsters to brave the elements.

It is pleasant to be able to record that the Long-tailed Tit still seems to be increasing in numbers, and that the Goldcrest was found breeding in the neighbourhood of Chesterfield for the first time for many years.

No doubt a certain number of rare birds, of which I have heard nothing, made their appearance in Derbyshire during the course of the year, but I must confess to being more interested in live birds than dead specimens, and unfortunately few rare birds escape without being shot.

ARRIVAL OF SPRING MIGRANTS:—The following are the dates.

Wheatear—near Chesterfield, March 23 (C.B.C.); near Winster, March 25; Thorpe, March 30 (C.H.W.).

Swallow—Somersal, April 7; near Chesterfield, April 13 (C.B.C.); Bakewell, April 14 (C.H.W.); Longstone, April 19 (J.S.W.).

Chiffchaff—Somersal, April 11.

Willow-Warbler—near Chesterfield, March 30 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 12, singing everywhere on the 14th; Longstone, April 17 (J.S.W.).

Tree-Pipit—Somersal, April 14, but not singing for some days; Longstone, April 23 (J.S.W.); near Chesterfield, April 24 (C.B.C.).

Redstart—Singing at Somersal, April 14.

Martin—Near Chesterfield, April 14 (C.B.C.); Bakewell, April 14 (C.H.W.); near Somersal, April 15.

Sand-Martin—Bakewell, April 14 (C.H.W.); near Somersal, April 15; near Chesterfield, April 23 (C.B.C.).

Ring-Ouzel—(Somersal, April 24; no doubt a straggler).

Cuckoo—Somersal, April 24; Longstone, April 29 (J.S.W.).

Yellow Wagtail—Near Chesterfield, April 19 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 26.

Whinchat—Near Chesterfield, April 19 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 26.

Whitethroat—Somersal, April 27; near Chesterfield, April 27 (C.B.C.).

Lesser Whitethroat—Somersal, April 29.

Garden-Warbler—Somersal, May 2; near Chesterfield, May 9 (C.B.C.).

Corncrake—Longstone, April 26 (J.S.W.); Somersal, May 2.

Sedge-Warbler—Somersal, May 3; near Chesterfield, May 9 (C.B.C.).

Sandpiper—Near Chesterfield, April 26 (C.B.C.).

Turtle-Dove—Near Chesterfield, May 4 (C.B.C.).

Swift—Derby, May 2 (C.H.W.); Longstone, May 2 (J.S.W.); Rowsley, May 4; Chesterfield, May 6 (C.B.C.).

Blackcap—Darley Dale, May 5.

Wood-Warbler—Darley Dale, May 6.

Flycatcher—Somersal, May 7; near Chesterfield, May 9 (C.B.C.).

The most remarkable date is that of the Willow-Warbler recorded in the Chesterfield neighbourhood; this is exceptionally early.

DEPARTURE OF MIGRANTS:—

Swift—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 5 (C.B.C.).

Redstart—Near Somersal, Sept. 8; near Chesterfield, Sept. 24 (C.B.C.).

Chiffchaff—Singing at Somersal, Sept. 14.

Willow-Warbler—Somersal, Sept. 19.

Flycatcher—Somersal, Sept. 21.

Whinchat—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 25 (C.B.C.).

Corncrake—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 26 (C.B.C.).

Swallow—Darley Dale, Oct. 14.

Martin—Still plentiful at Hathersage, Oct 7(R.C.); Darley Dale, Oct 23.

CLASSIFIED NOTES.

Smew, *Mergellus albellus*.—At the end of December a specimen was sent in to Derby to be stuffed. It is believed to have been shot at Trent Lock near Sawley. This was a male; a female, which was seen with it, I trust escaped.

Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*.—Towards the end of January, a specimen, which is believed to have been shot near Sawley, was sent to Derby to be stuffed. This bird is very rarely seen in Derbyshire.

Stone-Curlew, *Edicnemus edicnemus*.—Towards the end of October, 1922, a specimen of this very rare visitor was sent to Derby from Shardlow; it is believed to have been shot there.

Greenshank, *Totanus nebularius*.—A bird of this species was noted near Chesterfield in the autumn (C.B.C.).

Green Sandpiper, *Totanus ochropus*.—One was seen more than once near Chesterfield during the autumn (C.B.C.).

Curlew, *Numenius arquata*.—A nest containing six eggs was found this year on the Derbyshire moors (C.B.C.). This is an extraordinary number and looks as if two females had laid in the same nest.

Buffon's Skua, *Stercorarius longicaudus*.—In October, 1922, a specimen of this very rare visitor was picked up alive in an emaciated condition on the Derwent at Derby, and is now in the Derby Museum.

I should like to supplement these very inadequate notes on Derbyshire birds by asking those who are in any way interested in birds to do all they can to protect them. Some obvious ways of doing so may perhaps be mentioned here. Feeding the birds in severe weather and providing suitable nesting boxes will naturally be of great use, and all lovers of birds, who are not already members, should join the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which does a great work throughout the country. Even in these

days there is often to be found an extraordinary ignorance of the habits of birds, and the most harmless and useful kinds are sometimes mercilessly slaughtered; keepers are often the worst offenders, and anyone who preserves game can do much by preventing indiscriminate killing. Gardeners, too, are sometimes inveterate foes to certain species for no adequate reason, and in many cases the good work done for months is forgotten and obscured by a very little damage committed in a few weeks. Moreover the worst offenders do good as well as harm, and the much abused House-Sparrow must account for thousands of caterpillars while feeding its young.

Then there is the type of ornithologist who cannot see a rare bird without wanting to kill it and add it to his collection. The excuse is sometimes made that identification is impossible otherwise, and that, anyhow, no one will accept the identification unless the unfortunate bird is produced in the flesh. If the impulse to kill was resisted and the bird was stalked with the glasses instead of the gun, these rare appearances would no doubt become more common.

The oölogist is far worse; he is never satisfied with less than the whole clutch, and there seems no limit to the number of clutches he desires; many are the breeding places from which he has driven rare species by his depredations. To give an example: I have heard that some years ago the Red-backed Shrike used to breed with some regularity in Dovedale, but was driven away by the assiduous attentions of a very well known ornithologist.

It may be said for the collector with a gun that the bird he shoots, though a rare visitor to that particular place, may be quite common elsewhere, but with breeding species the case is very different, and the eagerness of the egg collector increases of course with the rarity of the species. It is a pity that the depredation of private collectors cannot be restrained to a greater extent than is now

possible. In conclusion I may mention that the address of the R.S.P.B. is 82, Victoria St. S.W.1.

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