

Ornithological Notes for Derbyshire, 1924.

By N. H. FitzHerbert.

IN connection with last year's notes I have received the following interesting letter from the Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain. "I got my *D. A. & N. H. S. Journal* the other day and turned to the Orn. Notes which I always read with interest. On p. 135 I came across this passage '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.' Now 'very well known ornithologists' are not common in Derbyshire, nor do they spend much time birdsnesting in Dovedale. I think you cannot be referring to or so perhaps are under the impression that the disappearance of the R. B. S. is due to me? I keep exact records of every nest I take or see, so have the pleasure of informing you that though I have seen several nests of R. B. Shrike *near* Dovedale I have only taken one clutch there in my life and that a c/4 which was known to village boys and was I think deserted. This is a fair sample of the evidence on which the collector is condemned. As a matter of fact the Shrike never did breed *in* Dovedale: the nesting place is outside the dale and I daresay the birds breed there still, though worried by nest destroying boys—not collectors. You say the oologist is 'far worse,' presumably than the man who shoots birds or the game preserver. Are you aware of the fate of the Derbyshire Peregrines and Merlins? For sheer barbarism what

is there to compare between the two cases? If a clutch is taken it is replaced within a very short space of time. Every naturalist knows that taking one or two eggs from a clutch diminishes the number of young reared. Taking the clutch is far less injurious: it merely throws back the time 10 days or so in most cases. You urge your readers to support the R.S.P.B. This Society is unfortunately run by ladies who are ignorant of ornithology. *The results are disastrous.* There were formerly up to 14 pairs or thereabouts of Whimbrel breeding on one island in the Shetlands. As this is one of our rarest breeding species it was most important to protect it. The R.S.P.B. indiscriminately protected all birds there including the Skuas. The result is that now they have reduced the Whimbrels to one pair (1923). Possibly by this time this has gone the way of the others. I do not believe you can point to such damage by collectors, though I do not uphold or approve of their methods in certain cases. In the case of destructive birds which I wish to keep down (such as Carrion-Crow) I find that the most careful and persistent egg taking of clutch after clutch has little or no effect on the species. On the other hand one keeper with a gun in the breeding season can clear the place of them in a few weeks. I find that even when two or three clutches are taken from a pair of Crows they bring off another brood every time! One expects hysterical ornithology from Miss Linda Gardner or Mrs. Lemon but not from any one who aspires to be an ornithologist, and I trust that if (as I believe) the statement you have made proves to be without foundation you will have the correction made with equal publicity."

Mr. Jourdain is quite right in assuming that he is the ornithologist whose name was mentioned to me, and I am very glad to give his correction equal publicity, as he requests, and express regret for any annoyance I may have caused him. He is good enough to explain in further

letters that his international reputation has been built up by work abroad and that he has done very little collecting in England so that he has evidently been greatly maligned. There seem to be a few points in his letter worthy of comment. In the first place I do not quite understand the importance attached to the fact that he has only taken one clutch of the Red-backed Shrike in the neighbourhood of Dovedale, while further on he argues that the taking of a clutch merely throws back the time ten days or so in most cases. He would surely maintain that if he had taken fifty clutches he would have done no damage, and that is where we differ. Secondly why should nest destroying boys worry birds more than collectors? Are we to suppose that the birds gladly surrender their eggs in the interests of science but resent their being taken by ignorant boys? As to the Peregrines and Merlins, they seem to me to be in different categories. The Merlin, except in isolated cases feeds chiefly on small birds like the Meadow-Pipit and seldom meddles with game. The Peregrine on the other hand is such a ruthless destroyer of game that to allow it to breed on a grouse moor would be more than could be expected from any preserver of game, and though my sympathies are always with the birds that does not prevent me from seeing the other point of view. After all it must be remembered that the game preserver spends a considerable amount of money on preserving and either owns or rents his land, while the collector as a rule trespasses in search of his eggs. Mr. Jourdain is rather hard on the R.S.P.B. No doubt mistakes have been made, but in the case he mentions he seems to imply that left to themselves the collectors would have taken the eggs of the Skuas and left the Whimbrels alone—rather an unlikely supposition! It is only fair to say that besides ignorant people like myself the R.S.P.B. numbers among its members plenty of sound ornithologists, though perhaps not of international reputation. With regard to the

effect of taking clutch after clutch this would no doubt vary with different species and though many like the Carrion-Crow might succeed in bringing off a brood after being robbed again and again, others which make elaborate nests, like the Long-tailed Tit for example, would find much more difficulty. Moreover the collector seems to forget that he is not the only enemy and that every clutch taken must lessen the chances of a brood being reared. One last point. Collector and scientist are often assumed to be synonymous and science is the cloak under which collectors hide their selfishness. Many private collectors would rob a pair of birds knowing quite well that they were the only birds of the species left to breed in the neighbourhood.

Though the winter of 1923-1924 was severe and prolonged, owing to the fact that snow did not lie for any great length of time not much damage was done to bird life. I heard no Song-Thrushes singing till January 22nd, and not till the 25th did I hear a Missel-Thrush, but on February 7th, quite an early date, two Chaffinches were singing against one another at Darley Dale, the worse songster of the two being very persevering. After this there was a good deal of frost and some snow so that Blackbirds were not to be heard till February 24th. The early part of March was cold, but there were some bright sunny days and the 23rd was a real spring day bringing out the Blackbirds in full chorus. This however was only a brief interlude and the cold east wind was soon in evidence again. The first migrant I saw was a Wheat-ear on April 6th; the night of April 7th was the first without frost for several days, everything was very backward and there was hardly any green to be seen in the hedges. The first Swallow appeared on April 11th, but was greeted by a heavy fall of snow on the following day. Towards the end of the month vegetation made a great advance and the hedges quickly became green, but it was

a very late spring. The summer was remarkable chiefly for the amount of rain which fell, and Derby day which was one of the wettest will be long remembered. The end of the year was mild and there was very little frost and practically no snow so that both kinds of Thrushes sang almost continuously right up to the end of December.

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

Ring-Ouzel—Derwent, April 9 (E.P.).

Wheatear—Near Chesterfield, March 27 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 6; Derwent, April 7 (E.P.).

Chiff-chaff—Somersal, April 14; near Chesterfield, April 19 (C.B.C.).

Willow-Warbler—Somersal, April 17; near Chesterfield, April 18 (C.B.C.); Longstone, April 19 (J.S.W.); Derwent, April 23 (E.P.).

Swallow—Somersal, April 11; near Chesterfield, April 18 (C.B.C.); Longstone, April 21 (J.S.W.); Derwent, April 26 (E.P.).

Sandpiper—Near Chesterfield, April 16 (C.B.C.); Derwent, April 21 (E.P.); Mapleton, April 29.

Tree-Pipit—Somersal, April 19; Rowsley, April, 22 (J.S.W.); near Chesterfield, April 27 (C.B.C.).

Martin—Near Chesterfield, April 18 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 19.

Redstart—Somersal, April 27; near Chesterfield, April 27 (C.B.C.); Derwent, May 9 (E.P.).

Sand-Martin—Near Chesterfield, April 18 (C.B.C.); Ashbourne, April 29.

Cuckoo—Derwent, April 21 (E.P.); Somersal, April 25.

Yellow Wagtail—Near Chesterfield, April 25 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 27.

Whinchat—Near Chesterfield, April 24 (C.B.C.); Somersal, April 30; Derwent, May 12 (E.P.).

Whitethroat—Somersal, April 27; near Chesterfield, May 8 (C.B.C.).

- Lesser Whitethroat*—Somersal, April 30.
Blackcap—Somersal, April 28.
Sedge-Warbler—Somersal, April 30.
Garden-Warbler—Near Chesterfield, May 5 (C.B.C.);
 Darley Dale, May 13.
Swift—Near Chesterfield, April 27 (C.B.C.); Derby and
 Darley Dale, May 6.
Spotted Flycatcher—Near Chesterfield, May 7 (C.B.C.);
 Darley Dale, May 14.
Wood-Warbler—Near Chesterfield, April 18 (C.B.C.);
 Somersal, May 3.
Corncrake—Near Chesterfield, May 5 (C.B.C.) Darley
 Dale, May 15.
Turtle-Dove—Near Chesterfield, May 13 (C.B.C.).

DEPARTURE OF MIGRANTS:—

- Chiffchaff*—Singing at Somersal, Sept. 16; last seen,
 Sept. 23.
Sandpiper—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 7 (C.B.C.).
Swift—
Whitethroat—
Whinchat—
Willow-Warbler— } Near Chesterfield, Sept. 8 (C.B.C.).
Wheatear—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 10 (C.B.C.).
Spotted Flycatcher—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 26 (C.B.C.).
Yellow Wagtail—Near Chesterfield, Sept. 27 (C.B.C.).
Swallow—
Martin— } Near Chesterfield, Sept. 21 (C.B.C.).

CLASSIFIED NOTES.

Raven—One was observed in the neighbourhood of
 Derwent on Sept. 8 (E.P.).

Peregrine Falcon—On two occasions this year Mr. E.
 Peat was lucky enough to see a Peregrine attack a Heron.
 They rose to a great height and then the Peregrine stooped,
 the Heron falling backwards with beak and feet towards the

Falcon and screaming all the time. This performance was repeated until the Peregrine at length gave up and the Heron made off as quickly as possible.

Bittern—In January one was shot at Trent Lock.

Spotted Redshank—A specimen of this extremely rare bird was obtained on Sept. 20 at Williamthorpe Reservoir (C.B.C.).

Whimbrel—On Sept. 16 a Whimbrel was shot out of a flock of about fifty at Shardlow; another rather larger flock passed over towards the end of the same month (B.O.C.).

Black-necked Grebe—One appeared on Williamthorpe Reservoir on August 30 and remained until Sept. 9. (C.B.C.). The appearance and apparently safe departure of this very rare visitor is of unusual interest.

In addition to these the following species were observed in the course of the year by Mr. Chambers at the ponds in the neighbourhood of Hardwick:—Sheld-Duck, Scaup, Goosander, Scoter, Pochard, Redshank, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper and Ringed Plover.

Messrs. C. B. Chambers, B. O. Corbett, E. Peat and J. S. Wright have kindly contributed notes.
