

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF HAMPSHIRE AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

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(Continued from Vol. VIII, Part III, page 288.)

THE Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) still nests plentifully on some of the Island cliffs, and is not infrequently seen on inland waters; the Shag (*P. graculus*), however, very rarely strays inland but still nests sparingly on Freshwater Cliffs, generally seeking solitary nesting-places under the overhanging ledges, about the caves near the foot of the cliffs. An immature Gannet (*Sula bassana*) was obtained near Kimpton in November, 1909.

I am not able to give any very complete information as to the present position of the Heron in the county, but since the publication of "Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight," in 1905, a few additional notes are available. Commander Dayrell Davies, of Wickham, informed me in December, 1905, that three nests were found in a wood opposite Knowle, called the Warren, in that year. At Vinney Ridge, in April, 1908, there were four nests, and the old birds were there, and broken shells found beneath the trees. In the Woolmer Heronry in April, 1912, there were six nests, but only two were occupied, both with young birds. Here they have gradually decreased. In 1915 an egg was obtained from a heron's nest in a wood near Waterloooville in June, which is an unusually late date. In the neighbourhood of Longparish it is understood that the herons which annually nested there were completely wiped out in 1916, both old and young birds having been destroyed at their nests. I wish to urge that the Heron should be more strictly protected, for the amount of harm it does is infinitesimal, it is one of our few remaining

large indigenous birds, and is an ornament to any country scene.

A Night Heron (*Nycticorax griseus*) was observed at New Milton on July 14, 1911, which had been about that district since May. It is recorded in "British Birds," Vol. V, No. 4, of September, 1911. Two, out of three, Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) were shot at Beaulieu on November 5, 1906. (See "British Birds," Vol. IV, No. 8, of January, 1911.) Another example has been obtained in the Isle of Wight, at St. Helen's, in April, 1895, and is recorded in Morey's "Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight."

The first specimen of the Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) obtained in the Island is also recorded in Morey's "Guide," and was an immature bird shot close to St. Helen's Station on October 6th, 1908.

The Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) occurs with increasing frequency in the winter in the county, but, unfortunately, many are ruthlessly killed. It would, no doubt, if left unmolested, breed again in the county, as it has already done in some other parts of England recently, and it is a great pity that more protection is not afforded it, and those culprits who destroy these birds made to pay the penalty laid down by law. Mr. Hart, of Christchurch, has a curious cream-coloured specimen in his collection, which was shot at Sopley Mark, near Christchurch, in January, 1906.

A Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*), a very scarce accidental visitor, frequented Frensham Great Pond, part of which is in Hampshire, in May, 1909. I had excellent opportunities of observing it there, both in the air and on the water, and considered it was undoubtedly a wild bird. While on the water it was very wild and wary, and usually kept near the swans, for one of which a casual observer might mistake it; it never came near the shore, but remained swimming in the deeper waters. Usually these birds wade in shallow water. It frequently flew between the Great and Little Ponds, and a correspondent to *Country Life* of May 15th, 1909, has contributed his observations of it on the Little Pond.

Numbers of Swans (*Cygnus olor*) have for some years past frequented Southampton Water all the year round. They are chiefly mature birds, and apparently do not breed there, as very few cygnets, or immature, birds are seen. Probably they originally strayed from the Beaulieu River. A pair of these birds usually nests in the marshes of the Newtown River in the Isle of Wight every year. Frensham Great Pond is also a favourite resort of Swans at all seasons, though none nest there. In April, 1910, on two occasions I counted 47 and 71 birds there, mostly birds of the preceding year.

The Common Sheldrake (*Tadorna cornuta*) is found, not un plentifully, on the coast of the county and the Isle of Wight, where it breeds. Hart, of Christchurch, has told me that it has also nested on Hurn Common. At the mouth of the Avon and Beaulieu Rivers it is always to be found. It still nests on the Newtown River in the Isle of Wight, where, in June, 1912, I watched a pair with five young ones; when a young one got tired of swimming, it hopped from the water on to its mother's back, and was borne along in this way. There were then probably three pairs breeding in that neighbourhood. A wild male Sheldrake was seen on Laverstoke Lake on March 19th, 1907. Mr. J. Baddeley, of Higher Broughton, Manchester, saw 16 near Needs Oar Point on the Solent in May, 1908. It was also seen several times in the summer of 1911 at Fawley. A curious hybrid was shot at Thorness, in the Isle of Wight, on January 31st, 1907, by Mr. F. T. Mew, which was supposed to have been a cross between a Sheldrake and a domesticated Indian Runner Duck.

The Wild Duck (*Anas boschas*) is plentiful everywhere in the county and Isle of Wight; and as they frequently commence laying in February, the close time should commence earlier than at present. The drake rarely takes any notice of the newly-hatched brood, leaving it entirely to the duck, and only once, at Laverstoke in May, 1906, have I seen the pair of birds accompanying the young. I found a nest with 20 eggs on March 20th, 1909, at Laverstoke, which is an unusual number, and which were certainly produced by one

bird. Most of the ducks, if pinioned and turned out in suitable localities, will breed freely; this has been the case especially with the Gadwall (*Chauliastur streperus*) at Beaulieu, the Pochard (*Fuligula ferina*) at Laverstoke, the Shoveller (*Spatula clypeata*), and other species. These home-bred birds attract wild ones of their own species, and the supply of wild fowl is considerably increased.

In the case of a brood of young Pochards reared on Laverstoke Lake, which was hatched about May 26th, 1906, I noticed that they were attended by the female, and though the male hung about in their vicinity, he was driven away by the female when he came too close. On July 15th they were nearly fully grown, and the male was then permitted to accompany them, and on September 6th, though they were then quite full grown, both the parents still attended them. The Teal (*Querquedula crecca*) is an increasing resident, and several fresh nesting localities have been noticed. The Garganey (*Querquedula circia*) has hitherto been considered a spring and summer visitor only; but Mr. Fox records in Morey's "Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight" that his father purchased a freshly-killed specimen in Sandown, in the winter, about 1875. For many years I have kept this species in captivity, and hope to publish notes on its habits and changes of plumage. It has now also been confirmed that the Shoveller nests regularly at Beaulieu.

The Tufted Duck (*Fuligula cristata*) is another species that has extended its breeding range considerably in the county, and Frensham Great Pond is added to other already known localities. In November, 1908, there were hundreds of Common Scoter (*Edemia nigra*) in Christchurch Bay. The Goosander (*Mergus merganser*) was noticed on Frensham Ponds in February and March, 1909, and one was shot in that locality about 1885 ("British Birds," Vol. III, No. 10). Part of Frensham Great Pond is in Hampshire, so it is possible that this species may have visited the Hampshire portion of the Pond as well as the part which is in Surrey.

Woodpigeons (*Columba palumbus*) are still a nuisance in

the county in the autumn and winter, and shoots are organized in some parts to reduce their numbers. In 1907 they were particularly abundant, and an epidemic made its appearance among them; in the northern part of the county especially numbers were found dead, apparently of this disease. The times of nesting of this species are most irregular, and, in addition to those instances quoted in "Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight," on November 3rd, 1906, I found a nest with one young one, at Laverstoke, which flew on November 5th; also a young one was caught at Freefolk on December 17th, 1906, which had not long left the nest. The Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*) does not usually associate numerously with the Woodpigeons, though sometimes a fairly large flock of this species alone may be seen in the autumn or winter. I notice a considerable increase in the numbers of the Turtle Dove (*Turtur communis*) in the county, and frequently small scattered flocks are seen feeding in the open fields.

Partridges and Pheasants are naturally not so plentiful as formerly, because they are not reared in such numbers or so strictly preserved during the war; but the former, being more naturally wild birds, are plentiful still. I saw a pair of partridges at King's Worthy make a determined assault on a young peewit, which they evidently intended to kill if I had not intervened. Every time it moved they attacked it furiously, in spite of the defence put up by the old peewits, and succeeded in breaking its leg before it was rescued.

The Quail (*Coturnix communis*) is still met with sparsely throughout the county. Some were introduced on the Heron Court estate in 1906, and a fair number were shot there during that shooting season, but the remainder soon disappeared. One was shot near Whitchurch on December 30th, 1907, and a nest with nine eggs found near Freefolk on September 11th, 1908. In July of the same year one was obtained alive at Roundwood, near Micheldever Station.

The Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) is now apparently extinct in the county, except in the New Forest, where a few still

remain. At the sale of the Woolmer Lodge effects in 1909 there were several specimens disposed of which had been killed in that neighbourhood, also a hybrid Cock Pheasant and Grey Hen. In the "Victoria History of Berkshire" there is an account of a clutch of six eggs of this species taken from a nest found on Yateley Common on March 31st, 1894.

Mr. Wadham, of Newport, reports a Spotted Crake (*Porzana maruella*) captured alive at Carisbrooke on November 27th, 1906, which he kept for about two months, until it was accidentally killed. It was fed chiefly on dried insects and fresh water shrimps. The most remarkable thing about the Corncrake (*Crex pratensis*) is that, though the bird is still to be found in the county, though perhaps not so commonly as formerly, its note is rarely heard.

In former years its familiar "craking" was one of the commonest sounds in the meadows in summer. The last time I heard it in any numbers was in 1910 at Laverstoke, and though four nests were found at Frost Hill, near Overton, in 1913, the birds were hardly ever heard. A specimen was shot near Ryde, in the Isle of Wight, in June, 1906. A curious capture of a specimen is recorded by Mr. Fox (in Morey's "Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight") in a cave below the Culver Cliffs about Christmas time.

The Moorhen and Coot are still very plentiful, and the latter particularly seems to have increased, for larger flocks than ever occur in the estuaries in the winter. A moorhen's nest was found at Freefolk in 1908, to which a Dabchick's nest was attached, and both contained eggs. Also in the same year a coot's nest was found at Laverstoke, in which, on April 20th, there were eight coot's and three moorhen's eggs.

An attempt was made some eight or ten years ago to re-introduce the Great Bustard on Salisbury Plain, but the utilization of that area as a military training ground unfortunately, brought the attempt to naught. On January 12th, 1910, an adult female was shot on Jamaica Farm, St. Mary Bourne, by Mr. W. Watts. It did not appear to have

been an escaped bird. (See "British Birds," Vol. IV, No. 6, of November, 1910.) The specimen of the Little Bustard shot on January 2nd, 1875, near Arreton, in the Isle of Wight, is now in Mr. Hart's collection at Christchurch. The Stone Curlew (*Edicnemus scolopax*) is still found in most of its old haunts in the county, and though in the neighbourhood of the training camps it has become scarce, in the more remote parts it is still as plentiful as ever. Though usually arriving in April, I have several records of their arrival early in March. In 1909 and 1911 they were unusually plentiful, and towards the end of April in the latter year, near Overton, I had an opportunity of watching the display of a small flock during their mating period, which I described in "British Birds," Vol. V, No. 8, thus:—"The cock birds at intervals showed off in most curious attitudes before the hens, and directly one began his display he was followed closely by a clamouring group of excited females. He would run before them with extended neck and lowered head, which he frequently turned and twisted about in a grotesque manner; the feathers of the body were puffed out, the wings open and drooped, and the tail spread, sometimes upwards and sometimes downwards. After a while a bird so displaying would always be brought near some other male, standing disconsolate and jealously watching; at him he would instantly rush. A furious fight would ensue, ending by his chasing the bird off the field. When chasing each other, they frequently hid among the scanty herbage, and it was amusing to watch the pursuer stretching himself to peer about in all directions, seeking his rival, and if he discovered him he would pitch into him, or if unable to see him would himself lie low until the other appeared from his concealment and made off as quickly as possible, to be soon discovered and chased beyond the arena. I watched two chasing each other for more than a quarter of a mile—always running, never flying. The victor would then hurry back to the hens, to find his place taken by another cock engaged in a similar display, and he would, in his turn, perhaps be chased away. It was remarkable that they never took to flight, but always ran. And so these antics continued

all the evening, until it was too dark to discern the birds, but their clamouring continued for some time longer." (When watching these birds, I happened to sit down on a tuft of grass in the hedgerow, from beneath which ran an exhausted Corncrake that had probably sought rest there after its migration to this country.)

The eggs, when laid on cultivated fields, may often be found, if the weather has been wet, by the ground trodden down near them by the feet of the birds going to and from the nest. I have taken a pair of eggs, near Overton, which were laid on the top of an old straw stack, about 10 feet from the ground; and on another occasion a pair was taken from a similar position on another stack not far from the first; possibly the same pair of birds may have chosen this unusual situation on both occasions. June 28th is a late date to find eggs, but in 1909 I found a pair near Micheldever, and on June 25th of that year a young one, three parts grown up, was brought to me from Roundwood. Records of this species in the Isle of Wight are scarce, but Mr. Isaacs, of Alum Bay, has noted its occurrence there in the winter.

The Ringed Plover (*Ægialitis hiaticula*) has increased considerably on the coasts of the county and of the Isle of Wight. In 1915 I found its nest on the beach at the mouth of the Newtown River on the banks of winkle shells cast up there. The Lapwing abounds in large numbers, and the flocks in winter are vaster than ever. The earliest dates I have noted of their eggs being found are on March 10th, 1908, at the Grange, near Alresford, and on March 7th, 1910, at Broughton. One egg was taken on the Longwood estate, near Owslebury, on March 5th, 1912. I had six eggs brought to me at Laverstoke on March 31st, 1908, and obtained two clutches of two eggs each on March 23rd, 1912.

A pair of Avocets (*Recurvirostra avocella*) were seen at Oakhanger Ponds, near Selborne, on August 25th, 1908. There does not appear to be any difference in the numbers of Woodcock, which is still thinly distributed, nor is there any noticeable extension of their breeding range in the county

beyond those localities where it has hitherto been found. A Great Snipe (*Gallinago major*) was shot by the late Major Turle in September, 1905, in a clover field near Newton Stacey. The Common Snipe (*Gallinago caelestis*) has increased very much, and pairs may now be found nesting in most unexpected places. The spring flight of a pair, when mating, is a pretty sight—one bird following the other close above the tops of the tall grasses, the first bird progressing with a series of jerks, followed by its ordinary flight for a few yards, then a drop, with its wings stretched out to their full extent and held upright over the back. It will then rise a fair height in the air, and again drop some distance, with its wings held upright, and "chuck" vigorously all the while. A Ruff (*Machetes pugnax*) was shot in Polhampton watercress beds, near Overton, on September 4th, 1905.

The Common Sandpiper (*Tringoides hypoleucus*) certainly occurs more plentifully on migration, but the Green Sandpiper (*Helodromus ochropus*) has not as yet, unfortunately, been found nesting in the county, though I am convinced its nest may yet be found. On August 25th, 1908, at the same time as the Avocets were seen, I saw six at Oakhanger Ponds, near Selborne, and I would suggest that they were a family party—possibly reared in the neighbourhood. I saw one, with a Common Sandpiper, on the edge of a cattle-pond at Freefolk on July 11th, 1906, not far from the pollard oak from which, years ago, I flushed a pair of these birds, as well as a pair of Barn Owls. The Rev. P. J. Woodcock, of Longparish, has seen it in the meadows near Drayton Park on April 26th, 1912.

The Redshank (*Totanus calidris*) extends its nesting area higher and higher up the river valleys. In 1913 they were meeting on Bransbury Common, and also a pair was seen in the meadows opposite the Cleaves at Hurstbourne. In 1918 they had not yet penetrated farther up the Test Valley, but on the Itchen had reached Brambridge. Large numbers nest in the marshes near the coast, both of the island and mainland, and in the dry meadows adjoining Newtown

marshes they may be seen running about and feeding like plovers.

The Common and Arctic Terns still visit their earlier nesting haunts on migration, but the Little Tern (*Sterna minuta*) is the only one which may possibly still nest within the county, and that only on the extreme eastern border. On August 22nd, 1918, at Sandy Point, on Hayling Island, there was a small party of these birds, old and young, which had certainly been reared in the neighbourhood—their former nesting-place, across the Hayling Channel, on the Sussex shore, having been washed away. One may reasonably suppose they had nested, perhaps, on Sandy Point itself. The old birds fished in the shallow waters, and placed their catches before the young, which had seated themselves on the edge of the water near by, and were apparently not yet capable of fishing themselves. An odd pair or two may always be noticed in the late spring or early summer about the sandbank at the mouth of the Avon at Mudeford, but they have not nested there for some years.

Vast flocks of gulls visit the fields of the central and southern parts of the county in the winter, returning to the coast to roost. The Black-headed Gull is most numerous, the Common Gull next, and the Herring Gull least, the latter species keeping more to itself. The gulls persecute the peaceful peewits, ever shadowing them on the look-out for discoveries made of food; hence the two species do not mingle willingly.

The Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) is sparingly represented among these flocks. This species is now established as being no longer a resident on the cliffs of the Isle of Wight, and though in former years it probably nested on the Freshwater and Culver Cliffs, it no longer does so. Probably the last eggs were taken at Freshwater about 1832. Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) nest in numbers on the Island cliffs of the Needles, Freshwater, and the Culvers, but in 1913, when I visited Freshwater, they had nearly all forsaken the High Down Cliffs, driven away, it was said, by foxes which infest

the cliffs and destroy the young as well as the old birds. A great deal of the lower part of these cliffs had fallen away, and as the gulls generally nest low down, this may also account for their forsaking them. The majority were then nesting on the Main Bench, and some had taken up their quarters on the east side of the bay, towards Compton Down.

Of numerous Herring Gulls I have kept in captivity, a pair laid in 1906, and eventually hatched a young one (after 29 days' incubation), each bird sitting in turns on the eggs; but the male bird instantly devoured the young one. On May 9th, 1907, they again commenced to sit on two eggs, a third egg being laid later. One young one was hatched on June 8th, which was successfully reared, and in June, 1910, had not yet quite assumed full plumage; on October 3rd, 1910, it flew away, but had, late that summer, assumed full adult plumage. The male of this pair was a very large bird with a darker mantle than usual, and after several years of captivity the colour of its legs changed from flesh colour to pale yellow—a characteristic of the Mediterranean Herring Gull (*Larus cachinnans*). The Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) is found on the coasts, chiefly in the winter, but very rarely strays any distance inland. It does not now nest on the Island, and the last time I saw any about the Freshwater Cliffs was in August, 1906, when I noted two parties—three adults in one party, and two adults and one immature in the other. Witherby, in July, 1912, only noticed one about the cliffs. One was shot near Overtown in May, 1905. I think the Greater Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) occurs more frequently than formerly; both adults and young may be observed, on the coasts usually, even as early as August.

Since "Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight" was published, the Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) has increased very much as a nesting species in the county; and though I have been unable to visit the known colonies lately, the colony on Parley Common in 1910 was pretty numerous, and that on Week Common had increased.

The Parley Common colony leads a variable existence, usually due to the season being either wet or dry ; for in a dry season there is very little water in Whitmere, where they nest. This colony was entirely exterminated in 1907 and 1908 from being disturbed and their eggs taken, when most of the birds moved to Week. This species has nested in the Newtown marshes in the Isle of Wight since 1884, and when I visited the locality in May, 1915, about a dozen pairs were nesting. The nests were built on the dry meadow-land, generally on the edges of the ditches, and were very slight structures built of straw or grass, with no concealment whatever. All our nesting colonies of this species vary in numbers considerably from year to year, due to the wetness or dryness of the season, but also on account of their accessibility, and to their being disturbed during the breeding season.

Of the very rare Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) an immature specimen was seen flying round the *Valhalla* in Cowes Roads on November 6th, 1905, by Mr. M. J. Nicoll, in the company of Kittiwakes and Herring Gulls, as is recorded in the *Ibis* of October, 1906. Mr. Rogers, of Freshwater, also has told me of two specimens shot by him in the Isle of Wight ; but I have not yet had an opportunity to see them, though I believe they are still in existence. The Skuas are occasionally noted on the coasts during autumn and winter, but rarely inland. I saw a pair of Common Skuas (*Stercorarius catarrhactes*) flying over Hazeley Down Camp, near Winchester, on February 3rd, 1918, and a specimen of Richardson's Skua (*Stercorarius crepidatus*) was shot at Longparish in the autumn of 1910 ; it was an immature, dark variety. Mr. Wadham, of Newport, has informed me of an immature female specimen of Buffon's Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) obtained on the Medina River at Newport, in the Isle of Wight, on February 20th, 1899.

There is a record of Leach's Fork-tailed Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) mentioned by More as having been obtained at Freshwater in 1857, and a stuffed specimen that I obtained from Mrs. Butler, of Yarmouth, in 1911 is probably

the one referred to. A specimen of the very rare visitor to the shores of our county, the Madeiran Fork-tailed or Harcourt's Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) was picked up dead on the beach at Milford, Hants, by Mr. Roland Follett on November 19th, 1911, and was given to me by my friend the Rev. J. E. Kelsall. Ticehurst, in his "Birds of Kent," says that "The only two specimens of this species hitherto recorded from the British Isles were obtained in Kent."

Since "Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight" was written, I have had many opportunities of observing the Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) on Frensham Great Pond, where they are more numerous than any other locality in the county; and though part of the pond is in Surrey, it is remarkable that the only suitable nesting-sites for this species are in Hampshire, no other shore of the pond being suitable or sufficiently secluded. They usually nest among the Equisetum, which grows thickly round these portions of the pond, and their time of nesting is entirely dependent on the growth of the weed. They generally nest in May, but in 1911 the weed was so backward that they did not lay until July, and some had reluctantly been compelled to build among flags and other kinds of reed that grew in the pond. The numbers of pairs nesting there varied from about four to eight or ten pairs. During the pairing season in April their actions are remarkable and grotesque. At this season they are in full breeding plumage, and very quarrelsome among each other and towards other birds, and were particularly aggressive towards some tufted ducks, which they chased about the water. The absurd actions of a male bird on a marshy spot which he evidently thought an ideal place for a nest were quite extraordinary. He stood upright on a patch of weed, with his head and neck stuck out stiffly on one side, uttered his crooning croak, raised his glossy breast into the air, and, making a pattering noise on the water with his feet, subsided on the surface. He then crawled out of the water to resume the same performance before an unconcerned female in the reeds.

They chase fish below the surface, which jump out of the water in all directions to avoid them. A good many of their eggs are destroyed by coots. I have several times noticed the young being carried on the backs of the old birds. This species has spread during the nesting season to several other localities in the county, and an adult pair was killed near Basingstoke in the spring of 1910. Also it occurs during the summer on Marsh Court, near Stockbridge, and on Fleet Pond it still regularly breeds.

A great many Little Auks (*Margulus alle*) were driven inland during a gale in November, 1917, and numbers of specimens were obtained at various places in the county. One was obtained at Longparish on January 17th, 1895, and another at Apsley, near Hurstbourne, in January, 1908. Razorbills (*Alca torda*), Guillemots (*Lomvia troile*), and Puffins (*Fratercula artica*) still abound during the nesting season on the Freshwater Cliffs, and the sinuous cracks and ledges there are lined with rows of Guillemots all seated facing the sheer walls, the holes and crannies each with its crowd of Puffins and Razorbills, and there is a constant stream of these birds passing to and from the cliffs to the sea.