# Baby Birds at Home

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# Natural History Works

By RICHARD KEARTON,
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*With Illustrations from Photographs taken direct from Nature by C. and R. Kearton*

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JAYS.

# BABY BIRDS AT HOME

By

RICHARD KEARTON, F.Z.S., Etc.

WITH FOUR COLOUR PLATES AND SIXTY ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY

CHERRY AND GRACE KEARTON

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# Preface

THIS little book has been prepared in order to give boys and girls who love the countryside, and the wild creatures that dwell therein, two things. First of all, a little gallery of faithful pictures of baby birds at home amidst their natural surroundings, and secondly, a short and simple account of the interesting habits of their parents.

Baby birds differ very widely in appearance, habits, and behaviour. Those that have to remain in the nest and be fed by their parents for days or even weeks, such as robins, thrushes, hawks, and eagles, are hatched with their eyes closed and do not open them for some little time. On the other hand chicks that run about, or swim, directly they leave the egg-shell, such as the wild duck, plover, grouse, partridge and snipe, have them open. All chicks that leave the nest as soon as they are hatched have a good

coat of down to keep their little bodies warm. Many of those that are reared in nests, or in hollow trees, are also covered with down, such as the kestrel, sparrow-hawk, and different species of owls.

Some, such as the chaffinch, skylark, and yellow-hammer, are hatched with tufts of down growing along their upper parts, and a few emerge from the shell without a particle of anything growing upon them. The common sparrow and cormorant are good examples of this bald entry into the world.

Young birds that run about as soon as they are hatched learn to catch insects directly, whilst those that remain in the nest have to defer this part of their education until a somewhat later period. It is not long delayed, however, for young sparrow-hawks may be observed trying to secure blue-bottle flies that alight on the edge of their nest. Baby skylarks, flycatchers, and the chicks of many other species, endeavour to catch passing insects whilst sitting in the nest anxiously awaiting their parents' return with more food.

One feature of baby bird life is always very noticeable to the careful observer, it

is the perfect obedience of chicks to their parents, otherwise many of them would never escape their enemies.

It is hoped that this little book will arouse an interest in the minds of boys and girls concerning our wild birds and their wonderful ways. Once that interest has been kindled, every walk in the country will reveal some new fact and create a fresh thrill of healthy pleasure.

RICHARD KEARTON.

*Caterham Valley, Surrey.*
*October,* 1912.

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# The Jay

THE Jay is a very beautiful and cunning bird. It lives in woods and spinneys and is not often seen in the open country. Gamekeepers dislike it very much, because it sometimes sucks the eggs of other birds, and gardeners shoot it because it occasionally eats peas and cherries.

During the autumn and winter its harsh loud call notes, that sound something like "*rake, rake,*" may frequently be heard in any wood where the bird lives, but in the spring-time it is singularly silent, unless there is a cat or a fox prowling about. Of course, this is very wise and helps to keep the whereabouts of its nest and eggs or chicks a secret. You may walk close past a Jay's nest day after day and never suspect its presence unless you happen to catch sight of it in its thick leafy bower. It is made of sticks and twigs and lined with rootlets.

The Jay lays from five to seven eggs of

a dusky green colour very thickly spotted with light brown.

The baby birds are fed in the most curious manner by their parents. Old Jays do not carry food for their chicks in the same way that starlings convey it to their young ones. Instead of being held in the bill and shown plainly to every observer, it is cunningly hidden in the mouth and thrust right down the throat of the hungry baby bird, so that, look however carefully he may, the observer cannot see what it is.

In some parts of the country where food is doubtless very plentiful, young Jays remain with their parents all the autumn and far into the winter, but, of course, in districts where food is scarce the family parties have to break up earlier and scatter, otherwise the supply would soon be exhausted and the weakest would starve.

Young Jays make very interesting pets and with a little patience can be taught to talk. Keeping wild birds in cages, however, is not a practice to be encouraged, unless it is the only way to save the unfortunate creatures from the wrath of the gamekeeper or the gardener.

CUCKOO AND FOSTER-PARENT

# The Cuckoo

WE all love the Cuckoo's welcome notes. They tell us of the arrival of spring and the coming of glorious summer days.

In character and habits the Cuckoo is a weird bird. Arriving upon our shores during the latter half of April, it speedily begins "to tell its name to all the hills around." At the height of summer, and especially in the north of England and Scotland, it may frequently be heard, not only by day, but all the night through.

The female does not build a nest, sit on her eggs, or rear her own young ones. Although almost as large as a lapwing, her eggs are no bigger than those of the skylark. This is, no doubt, a very useful arrangement so far as the Cuckoo is concerned, but it often proves a great misfortune to smaller birds.

No sooner has the female Cuckoo laid a wee, spotted egg than she picks it up in her

bill and carries it to the nest of a meadow pipit, hedge sparrow, pied wagtail, tree pipit, or other small bird. The owner of the nest either does not notice, or does not mind, the addition to her clutch, and keeps it warm and dry along with her own eggs.

In due season the baby Cuckoo is hatched, and speedily reveals a character as black as the ugly skin that covers its ungainly body. Although it cannot see, it can feel, and does not rest until it has succeeded in getting the other chicks, or eggs, in the nest on to its back, and by a mighty effort thrown them out of their rightful home.

A baby Cuckoo never appears to be either satisfied or grateful. Its foster parents may bring caterpillars along as fast as ever they can find them, but the chick's great ugly mouth is for ever held widely open in request of more.

It is a stupid chick, for when it has fledged and is waiting for food it does not stoop to meet its wee foster mother, but rears its head high in the air, quite out of reach of any pipit or wagtail. The little bird is therefore obliged to jump on its back, and drop the food down its throat.

YELLOW HAMMERS.

# The Yellow Hammer

YOU are not at all likely to mistake this very familiar British bird for any other, unless it be, perhaps, its much rarer and shyer relative, the cirl bunting. All you have to remember is that the male has no black on his yellow head, and the female is not marked with yellowish brown under her chin.

The Yellow Hammer is common all over the country. The male loves to sit on the top of a hedge or bush and sing by the hour together. His song is not of first-class order as bird-music goes. It consists of two oft-repeated notes, and has been aptly likened to the words, "A little bit of bread and no cheese." Many people consider it a dreary affair, but it has the merit of being uttered during hot July days when other feathered vocalists are silent.

The nest is built in a bramble, thorn, or other bush. Sometimes it is eight or ten

feet above the ground, and at others right down upon it. The one shown in our illustration was made in the shelter of a tuft of grass. It is constructed of dry grass and roots, with an inner lining of fine grass and horsehair.

The eggs generally number four or five, although sometimes there are only three in a clutch, and at others as many as six. They are of a dingy white colour tinged with purple and spotted and scrawled with dark purplish brown.

The Yellow Hammer commences to breed in April and goes on until very late in the summer. You may sometimes find its nest containing eggs, or young, even in the month of August.

The chicks are fed by both parent birds, but the male is much shyer than the female as a rule.

Nestling Yellow Hammers make a very unruly family. Long before they are ready to fledge, they become so boisterous that before their mother has time to reach them with a collection of insects, they crowd and push and all but walk out of their little home to meet her.

WILLOW WRENS.

# The Willow Wren

SOME difficulty will no doubt be experienced by young nature-students in distinguishing this little warbler from its relatives the chiffchaff and the wood wren, as it is somewhat similar in size, appearance, and habits to both these birds. It is larger than the chiffchaff, however, and is not so green on its upper parts or light-coloured underneath its body as the wood wren.

The song of the Willow Wren differs widely from that of its relatives, and if you are gifted with a good ear for music, this fact will help you. Its notes mount up round and full, and then run down the scale and expire, whereas those of the wood wren consist of sounds something like "*sit-sit-sit-sit see-eeeeeze,*" each note rising in pitch and finally ending in a long thin one. The chiffchaff's song cannot be confused with that of any other bird, because it consists of two oft-repeated notes that sound like "*chiff-chaff.*"

The Willow Wren, or Willow Warbler, as it is frequently called, is a migratory bird, arriving in April and departing again in September. It is found all over the British Islands wherever bushes and trees grow.

It builds its nest on the ground amongst coarse grass and weeds, on banks near willow-fringed streams, in woods, on commons, and almost anywhere and everywhere. The structure is made of dead grass, moss, leaves, and fern fronds, and is lined with hair and feathers. It is domed or covered over and has an entrance hole in front.

The eggs, numbering from four to eight, are white, spotted with pale rusty-brown.

Baby Willow Wrens are very tiny and frail when they emerge from the egg-shells, but grow very rapidly. They have, however, many enemies. Not long ago the writer saw a Willow Wren hovering, just like a humming-bird, over the grass wherein she had built her nest, and upon going to the place found a large adder in the act of swallowing her chicks. The reptile had devoured four out of a family of six, but speedily paid the penalty of its misdeeds.

MERLINS.

# The Merlin

THE Merlin is the smallest member of the Falcon family found breeding in the British Islands. The male bird only measures some ten inches in length and is therefore an inch shorter than the missel thrush. The female Merlin is somewhat larger than the last-named bird.

The "Blue Hawk," or "Stone Falcon," as the Merlin is otherwise known, breeds on the ground in deep heather on moors in the wildest parts of the country. The nest consists of a slight hollow lined with a few sprigs of heather or dead grass. On rare occasions the bird will use the old nest of a carrion crow.

Four or five creamy white eggs thickly covered with dark reddish brown spots, and blotches are laid.

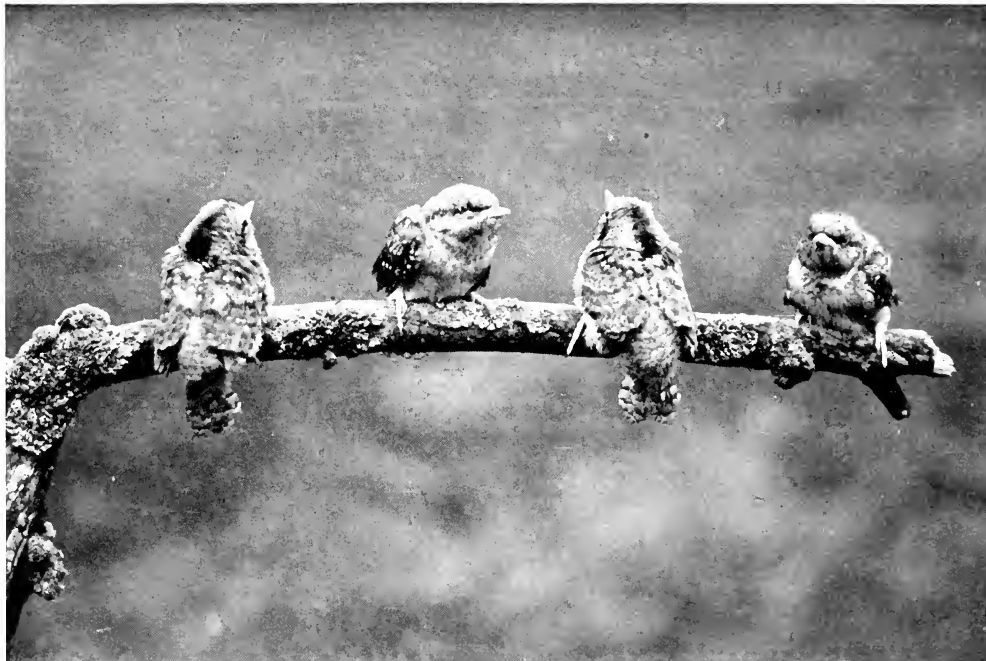
The male catches pipits, larks, and other small birds for the female, whilst she is sitting on the eggs. Upon returning home

with the prey in his talons, he alights on a knoll at some distance from the nest, and calls his mate to the feast. Whilst the hen is satisfying her hunger he sometimes visits the nest and takes a peep at the eggs.

Baby Merlins are covered all over with a beautiful coat of white soft down, and if an attempt is made to stroke them, even when they are very young, they roll over on their backs, and strike upwards with their sharp claws. They do not like rain, and if a heavy shower happens to fall during their mother's absence, they call out for her in the most piteous manner.

When breeding on a grouse moor the plucky little Stone Falcon finds a deadly enemy in the gamekeeper, who is ever on the look out for its nest. He would find it more frequently, but for one very cunning habit practised by the species.

Merlins feed their chicks upon small birds. They take the greatest care, however, not to pluck any of their victims at the nest. Tell-tale feathers scattered about on the heather would soon attract the attention of the gamekeeper, and he would quickly discover and slay the whole family.



WRYNECKS.

# The Wryneck

THE Wryneck is a migratory bird arriving in this country during the month of April. Although no larger than a skylark, it soon makes its presence known by its loud and oft-repeated call notes, which sound something like *"que, que, que."* On account of its arrival a few days before the cuckoo it is known in many parts of the country as the "Cuckoo's Mate."

In many respects it is a strange bird. It breeds in holes in trees, and lays its seven or eight pure white eggs on the bare wood. If some young would-be egg-collector should happen to come along and thrust his wicked little hand into the hole, the sitting Wryneck will hiss just like a snake. This mild piece of deception often succeeds in frightening the young robber away.

She also has another queer little trick, and curiously enough it is one from which

her name has been derived. If you should be bold enough to thrust your hand down to the bottom of her breeding hole and capture her, Mrs. Wryneck will, upon being withdrawn, most likely give you a surprise. Stretching out her neck and twisting her head over her back she will, with closed eyes and ruffled crown, pretend to be dead. As soon as you have been taken off your guard, however, by this clever piece of shamming, she straightens out her wry neck and instantly flies away.

This bird, like the woodpeckers, possesses a very long worm-like tongue. It is horny at the tip and supplied with a sticky substance to which ants and other insects adhere when touched. This clever contrivance enables the bird to capture prey quite out of sight in tunnels and galleries.

A young Wryneck may frequently be seen thrusting its head out of the nesting hole and anxiously looking for its father, or mother, with more food. Upon leaving the old home the chicks can cling to the rough bark with their claws, and run with ease up the trunk of the tree, inside of which they have been reared.

HERRING GULLS.

# The Herring Gull

IF you are not very familiar with this bird you are likely to confuse it with another feathered friend from the sea—the Common Gull. Both are white and light grey in colour, but the two following points of difference serve to distinguish the one from the other.

The Herring Gull is about twenty-four inches in length, and has flesh-coloured legs and feet, whereas its relative is only about eighteen inches long, and has greenish yellow legs and feet. Both may be seen together following steamers in harbours, or picking up worms and grubs turned up by the plough, but the Common Gull rarely breeds anywhere round the English coast.

The Herring Gull breeds on ledges of sea cliffs, on low rocky islands, and on moorland marshes, inland. Its nest is made of dry seaweed, sprigs of heather, or whatever else happens to be lying around, and is lined with grass, which is often used quite green.

Sometimes it is a bulky structure, and at others a very scanty affair.

The eggs number two or three, varying from olive green to buffish brown in ground colour, marked with spots and blotches of dark brown and grey. They are very similar in size, shape, and colour to those laid by the Lesser Black-backed Gull, and as the birds sometimes breed together, you can never make quite sure to which species a clutch belongs, unless you see the mother bird on them.

Young Herring Gulls are covered with greyish buff down, which is streaked and spotted with black on the head and upper parts. When hatched on an island, or in a marsh, they leave the nest almost directly and hide amongst the vegetation, or in holes under overhanging peat banks.

If you catch one it will soon show you that it has a great idea of defending itself, by attempting to bite your face or hands, and its powerful bill can give an ugly nip.

Herring Gulls do not, as their name would suggest, confine themselves to eating fish, but will devour the eggs and chicks of other birds.

COMMON OR GREATER WHITETHROATS.

# The Greater Whitethroat

COUNTRY people call this bird the Nettle Creeper, on account of its habit of seeking its food and frequently building its nest amongst nettles. Whitethroat is also a very good common name, because it is a little brown bird with a white throat and pale grey under-parts.

You are very likely to confuse it with the Lesser Whitethroat—which is a rarer bird—if you do not remember that it is nearly half an inch longer, has a grey head, and that the brown feathers on its back are edged with a reddish tint, whereas those on its smaller relative are bordered with greyish brown.

The Greater Whitethroat is a migrant arriving in April and taking its departure again in September and October. It breeds in nearly every suitable part of the British Islands.

The nest is a deep but flimsy structure made of grass stems and horsehair, and

is built amongst nettle stems, in bramble, brier, and other bushes. From four to six eggs are laid, of a dirty greenish white colour, marked with brown, and grey spots.

Whilst the hen is sitting on her eggs, the cock may be heard excitedly pouring forth his song, which consists of a few sweet oft-repeated notes. Sometimes, in his wild joy, he mounts the air from the top of a favourite bush, and fairly bubbles over with song, as he descends again.

The young are fed upon caterpillars, small beetles, and all kinds of insects, and it is a very pretty sight to watch the brooding female rise and stand on the edge of the nest, whilst her mate delivers his catch of insects to the chicks. They both appear to be very fond of their offspring, and bestow a great deal of care and attention upon the wee, frail creatures.

The Common Whitethroat may often be seen in the fruit garden during late summer, and is accused of taking its share of the good things growing there, but the labourer is worthy of his hire, and the gardener owes the bird a debt for good work done earlier in the season.

SPARROW HAWKS.

# The Sparrow Hawk

THE Sparrow Hawk does not fly at any great height above the ground, or hover in the air like the kestrel. It prefers to steal quietly over a hedgerow, or round the corner of a wood, and surprise some unfortunate little bird feeding on the ground. Its swift flight, and the remarkable ease with which it can twist and turn in the air, give the victim but a small chance of escape in the open.

Some small birds avoid it, however, by dashing into thick bushes, and remaining there until the danger has passed. Terrified titlarks have been known to take refuge inside houses, and even in railway carriages in motion.

Birds as large as the red grouse and lapwing are sometimes slain by this fierce robber of the air, and occasionally such watchful creatures as the jay are caught napping by it.

The male Sparrow Hawk only measures about a foot in length, but his mate is some

three inches longer, and nearly twice his weight.

This species breeds in woods. Its nest is built of sticks and twigs, and is large and shallow. Sometimes it is in the fork of a tree, and at others on a strong, horizontal branch.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are white, tinged with blue or bluish green, boldly marked with pale and rich dark brown spots and blotches.

Baby Sparrow Hawks are covered with white fluffy down when they are hatched, and when seen in the nest, they remind one of a collection of powder-puffs in a basket. A Sparrow Hawk household is rather like a human one. The father bird does all the hunting after food, whilst the mother stays at home and looks after the chicks. She takes up her station on some dead tree, or stump that will afford her a good outlook, and is not too far from the nest. When her mate returns home with food, she takes it from him and divides it amongst the chicks, and if you are hiding anywhere near the nest, you can hear the chittering welcome they give their mother on her arrival.

PEEWIT OR LAPWING.

# The Peewit or Lapwing

THIS interesting bird is well known to nearly everybody, for it frequently breeds within a few miles of large towns and cities. It loves marshlands, fallow fields, and moors, and is known by three different names, all of which are suitable: Peewit after its own call note, Lapwing on account of the way it folds or laps its wings when flying, and Green Plover because of the green colour of its back.

The Lapwing breeds on the ground. Its nest consists of a slight hollow, lined with bits of dead grass, rushes or rootlets. The eggs are four in number, large for the size of the bird and shaped very much like pears. They are always found lying with their sharp ends pointing inwards, and thick ends outwards. This is a very wise arrangement, because it prevents any space being lost in the nest, and enables the mother bird to cover them properly and

give each an equal share of the warmth of her body.

If you would like to know what a Peewit thinks of the shape of her eggs, just try the following experiment on the next nest you find. Turn all the eggs round about, thick ends inwards, and pointed ends outwards, then leave the place altogether for half an hour.

When you go back you will find, if you have given the mother bird an opportunity of returning to her home in the meantime, that the very first thing she has done has been to set her household in order. She has replaced her eggs, and they are lying just as you found them.

Baby Lapwings begin to run about directly they are hatched, and are very obedient to their parents. When there is no sign of danger to be seen they wander round with their mother in the most joyous manner. If a hawk should appear in the sky, the old bird sounds her alarm note and the chicks instantly crouch flat upon the ground, and do not move again until their parent tells them by a reassuring cry that the danger has passed.

FIELDFARE.

# The Fieldfare

THIS bird belongs to the Thrush family. In size it is smaller than the missel thrush, and somewhat larger than the common throstle.

You will not find its nest in this country at all, as it is only a winter visitor, arriving from the Continent in October and departing again in April or May. During the winter months large flocks are to be seen roaming over pastures and meadows, in search of worms and grubs, in all parts of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. If the weather should be very severe they eat such hedge-fruits as hips and haws.

You nearly always know when a flock of Fieldfares is passing over your head, because the birds keep on calling to each other in loud, harsh notes. In Norway, where they breed, Fieldfares can be heard all night long, but, of course, it is never quite dark there in the month of June.

The male begins to sing as early as March, if the weather should be mild and sunny, but his notes are low, soft, and few in number. He sings to his mate whilst she is building her nest, but never appears to think that he ought to attempt to help her. He frequently sings whilst on the wing.

Fieldfares breed in colonies just like rooks or herons, and in some Scandinavian forests hundreds or even thousands nest together, and the noise they make when disturbed is wellnigh deafening.

The nest of this species is made of twigs and straws, mixed with mud, and lined with fine grass. It is generally placed in a spruce or birch tree, at varying heights from the ground. The writer has seen half a dozen nests containing eggs, or young ones, in quite a small birch tree.

The eggs of the Fieldfare number four to six, varying from light to dark bluish green, mottled all over with light, or dark reddish brown.

As soon as the baby birds have been hatched the old male helps to find food for them.

RED GROUSE.

# The Red Grouse

THIS is a most interesting bird. In the first place, it is not found in a natural state anywhere in the world excepting in the British Islands, and in the second, it is more prized by sportsmen than, perhaps, any other bird that flies.

The Red Grouse is found on all suitable moors and heaths from the Orkney Islands as far south as Staffordshire, in Wales, and the peat bogs and moorlands of Ireland.

It feeds upon the tender shoots of heather and ling in the summer, and in the early autumn is partial to oats, if any should be grown near its haunts, and the seeds of the buttercup. During severe weather, in the winter, the Red Grouse descends from the high snow-wreathed ground and may sometimes be seen in hawthorn bushes feeding upon the buds.

This species is very talkative, especially between dawn and sunrise on a fine frosty

morning. At the first peep of day the female commences to call "*yow, yow, yow,*" in a peculiar nasal tone, and is promptly answered by the male with a resounding "*cabow, cabow, cabeck cabeck, beck, beck.*" Other notes are also employed by this gentleman of the hills: "*cockaway, cockaway,*" when he seems very happy, and "*cock, cock, cock,*" when he is alarmed.

The Red Grouse pairs early, and the nesting season is in April, May and June, although eggs are frequently found earlier and later.

The nest is generally well hidden in heather, or ling, occasionally amongst rushes, and the eggs, numbering from five to nine, are of a dirty white ground colour, thickly blotched and spotted with reddish brown.

The baby birds are covered with a thick coat of down, which is of a light buff colour above, marked with brown and yellowish brown underneath. They leave the nest directly they are hatched, and if any danger should suddenly appear on the scene, they scatter north, south, east and west, and hide, whilst their mother, feigning a broken wing, flaps round and round the intruder until her chicks are safe; then she flies off.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS.

# The Spotted Flycatcher

THE Spotted Flycatcher is a little brown bird with light under-parts, and dark brown spots and streaks on the crown of its head and throat. It is a trifle longer than a house sparrow, but not quite so stoutly built. It is known by several common names, each one of which has some reference to its character and habits.

You are sure to see this bird in some well-wooded part of the country, perched on a gate-post or the dead branch of a tree, and may notice that at intervals it will suddenly fly off, flutter in the air for a moment or two, and then return to its original resting-place. The fact is, it has caught sight of a passing fly and darted forth to secure it.

This bird is only a summer visitor to our country, arriving in the early part of May, and returning again to the sunny South in September and October. A pair

of Spotted Flycatchers will return season after season to inhabit some favourite breeding haunt.

The nest of this species is made of straws, rootlets, moss, hair, feathers and rabbit's down. It is built on the branches of fruit trees trained against walls, holes in walls, on ledges of rock, on the stumps of broken trees, on the ends of beams projecting from old houses, and in recesses in the trunks of trees caused by the wood decaying.

The eggs, as a rule, number five, of a greyish or light green colour, marked with faint red or reddish brown.

Nestling Flycatchers keep their parents busy procuring winged insects for them, and when you are near one of the old birds in the act of seizing a fly, you can actually hear its bill snap as it closes on the luckless creature. No sooner has a sufficient collection of flies been made than away hies the parent bird to the nest with them. Then there is great excitement. Every neck is stretched, and every mouth is widely opened in expectation of a dainty morsel. Sometimes bees and quite large moths are brought along.

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAILS.

# The Blue-headed Wagtail

THIS is a rare British bird, found breeding occasionally in Kent and Sussex. It is similar in size, shape and general appearance to our familiar friend, the Yellow Wagtail, but there is one feature by which the males of one species can always be distinguished from those of the other. The head of the Yellow Wagtail is of a very pale olive colour, with a streak of bright yellow over the eye, or the head may be yellow all over, whereas that of the bird under notice is bluish grey, and the streak over the eye is white.

The call notes of this bird are almost exactly like those of the Yellow Wagtail, and can be heard at a considerable distance.

If you set out to find a nest you will discover, as the writer has done on the Continent, that it is exceedingly well hidden under an overhanging tuft of grass, in a hole under a large stone, or amongst the

exposed roots of a tree. The old birds guard their secret well by calling, flying overhead and generally endeavouring to lead the intruder away from it.

The nest is made of dead grass, rootlets and moss, and is neatly lined with horsehair. From four to six eggs are laid. They are very similar in appearance to those of the Yellow Wagtail: greyish white in ground colour, mottled with varying shades of brown.

Baby Blue-headed Wagtails are fed upon small moths, caterpillars, water insects and flies. Both parent birds are very industrious in finding food for the chicks, and once they know you have found the nest, they will alight near to you and become much bolder. If you should sit down so close to the nest that the old birds dare not venture up to it to feed the chicks, they will keep on calling to them until the youngsters will hop out and begin to run away, even before they are able to fly.

The young males in their first coat of feathers resemble the adult female in her summer dress, except for the fact that the grey on the head is somewhat mixed with brown.

MISSEL THRUSHES.

# The Missel Thrush

IT will not be easy to confuse this bird with its better known relative, the common song thrush, if the following simple facts are remembered. It is nearly three inches longer, much greyer in colour on the back, and shows a white mark on either side of its tail whilst flying.

Its song is not a great vocal accomplishment, but has the merit of being uttered when the weather is so rough that it has silenced every other musician of the grove. In fact the "Storm-cock," as the bird is frequently called, seems to glory in a gale. During such weather he will sit on the topmost branch of some tall tree and pour forth his defiant notes heedless of the howling wind and lashing rain.

He commences to sing in December or January in England, and may be heard as late as the end of June in Scotland.

The nest is made of slender twigs, grass

stems, moss, wool and mud, and is lined with fine dry grass. It is generally placed in the fork of a tree, or on some strong branch in orchards, woods, parks and plantations.

The eggs number four or five, of a greyish green colour marked with blotches and spots of a reddish brown tint.

The young ones are gifted with wonderful appetites, and gulp down every worm and grub brought by their parents. When the time comes for them to fledge they grow very uneasy, shifting about and standing on the edge of the nest, fluttering their little wings or cleaning and dressing the quills with their beaks.

Missel Thrushes are very courageous birds, and will chase a carrion crow, or rook, away from the neighbourhood of their chicks. One has been known to die in defending her young ones against the attack of a weasel.

The harsh alarm cry of this species sounds very much like the noise made by a child's wooden rattle.

Young Missel Thrushes are very fond of bathing during hot weather, when whole families may be seen splashing about in some shallow pond or on the margin of a stream.

REDWINGS.

# The Redwing

THIS bird is very like the common song thrush in size and general appearance. It is, therefore, difficult to distinguish it from that bird at any little distance. If you are close enough, however, or can look at it through a good field-glass, you will see that the Redwing has a light line over the eye, and that its sides are of a reddish orange colour.

Great numbers of Redwings spend the winter in our pastures and meadows, feeding upon worms, snails and grubs. They do not stay to breed with us, however, but retire in the spring to northern Europe, where they rear their young.

When they come back again in the autumn, they can often be heard calling to each other at night time, whilst flying over towns and cities.

Although Redwings may be found in June breeding close to large snowdrifts on

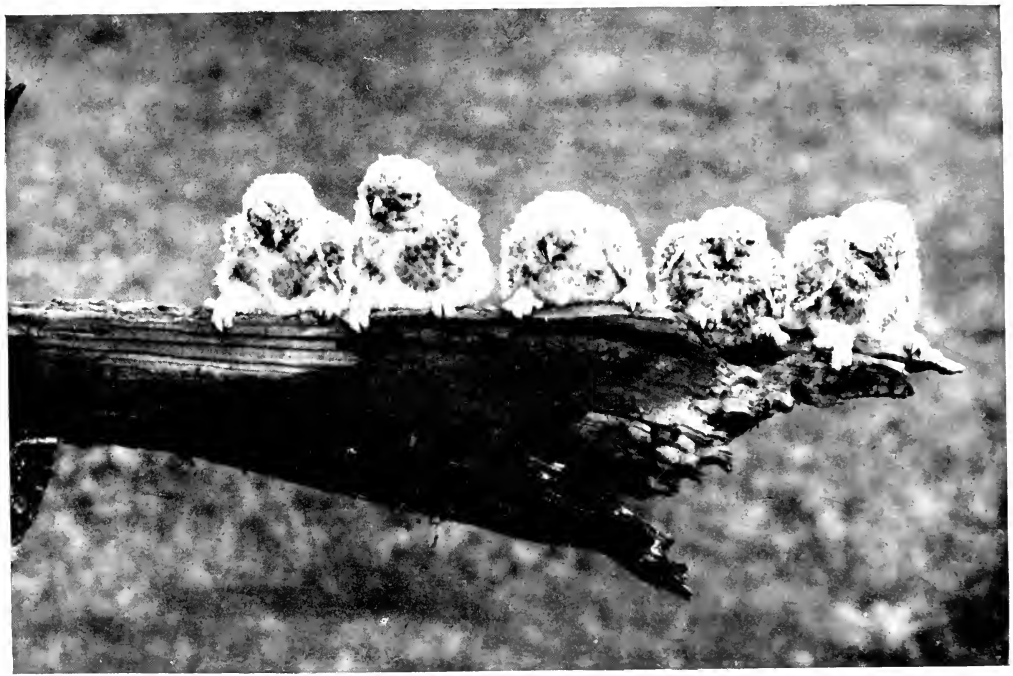
the mountains of Norway, they are by no means hardy birds. In fact, they are rather delicate, and amongst the first of our feathered friends to creep into holes and die during long periods of hard frost.

The song of the Redwing is a very poor affair when compared with that of the common thrush. It consists of two or three oft-repeated notes, and is apt to grow wearisome when one hears nothing else in a lonely forest.

The nest is generally placed in a juniper or other low bush, and both it and the eggs resemble those of the blackbird, excepting for the fact that they are smaller.

Baby Redwings behave just like young song thrushes. If a twig should shake near the nest, every head is thrust high in the air and each little mouth is opened wide in request of a tit-bit.

The parent birds both protest loudly if you find and examine their little home. The cock will sometimes fly straight at you as if he intended to strike you in the face, but generally rises over your head, upon getting quite close, and, alighting in a birch tree, scolds loudly against your intrusion.



LITTLE OWLS

# The Little Owl

ALTHOUGH common throughout the centre and south of Europe, the Little Owl was at one time only an accidental visitor to England. Since the days of the amusing old naturalist Waterton, however, many people have brought specimens over from Greece, Italy, Holland, Spain and other countries, and turned them loose, until it is now quite a numerous species in many parts of England.

The Little Owl was greatly esteemed by the ancient Greeks, and is said to have been the favourite bird of the Goddess of Wisdom.

You will recognise it quite easily, whether you see it on the wing or at rest, because it is much smaller in size than any other owl in our country, and flies about in search of its prey just as much by day as it does by night.

The Little Owl is brown on its upper

parts, marked with whitish oval spots, and greyish white underneath, streaked with brown. The female is only some eight-and-a half inches in length, and her mate even somewhat smaller.

Mice, small birds, moths, grasshoppers, beetles, worms, and all kinds of insects are greedily eaten by this bird.

Holes in old trees, rocks, and the roofs of houses are used for breeding purposes. The eggs number from four to six, are oval in shape, and pure white.

The Little Owl breeds close to London and is a great hater of cats, crying out in angry chattering notes whenever it espies one of these animals.

Although mobbed by blackbirds, chaffinches, and other feathered creatures, who have reason to dislike it, this wee owl feeds its young ones, all day long, in the most unconcerned manner. It darts like a flash into the nesting hole with the food, and if there is anything in the neighbourhood calculated to arouse its suspicions, peeps out cautiously to see if the coast is clear before leaving home again. The young are clothed in soft, white down, and look very quaint.

CORMORANTS.

# The Common Cormorant

THE Common Cormorant is decidedly a bird of character and intelligence. Both the Chinese and Japanese have for centuries trained it to catch fish for them, and it is interesting to note, by the way, that this peculiar sport was introduced into Europe some time during the seventeenth century. James I. of England was very fond of watching his trained Cormorants catch fish for him, and his son Charles I. inherited his father's tastes in this direction.

This bird is easily tamed and soon becomes attached to its owner.

A pair of Cormorants has been known to feed and rear a family of young ravens, whose parents had met with an untimely end.

The Cormorant secures its prey by diving and swimming under water after it, and can swallow fish of large size. After a meal you may often see a number of these birds standing in a row on some rock, with heads

raised and wings stretched out in full enjoyment of a rest in the sunshine.

Tall tree tops, ledges on cliffs, or low rocky islands, will suit the Cormorant equally well for breeding purposes.

The nest is a bulky structure, made of sticks and seaweed, and lined with coarse grass. It does not matter much, however, whether it is a child's whip, or the skeleton of a seagull, this bird will utilise it as building material.

Three eggs are generally laid, but as many as five or six may be found in a clutch. They are small for the size of the bird, and pale blue in colour. The real shell is usually hidden by a thick coating of chalk, which can be scraped off quite easily with a pocket-knife.

Young Cormorants are hatched absolutely naked, and as their shiny skins are bluish-black, they look rather ugly. In a few days, however, they grow a coat of dusky black down, and when old enough to swim and dive are said to be carried on the backs of their parents down to the sea. They are exceedingly nervous, and appear to be panic-stricken, if you handle them in the nest.

GARDEN WARBLERS.

# The Garden Warbler

THE Garden Warbler is a little brown bird of retiring habits. It is about six inches in length, but cannot very well be mistaken for a female blackcap if the fact is remembered that it has no rusty brown on the top of its head ; or for the whitethroat, because the colour under its bill and on its breast is a dull lightish brown.

It is a migratory bird arriving from the South towards the end of April or beginning of May, and returning again to its winter quarters in September and October.

The song of the male is considered by many nature-lovers to be almost as good as that of the blackcap, and several of its notes may easily be mistaken for those of that favourite Warbler. They are of the same bright, pure, musical quality, but not quite so powerful, and are delivered in a rather more hurried manner.

Concealed in some thick bush the Garden

Warbler will, if undisturbed, pour forth its sweet music by the hour together.

It is fond of quiet gardens and secluded woods, with plenty of thick undergrowth, where it can find caterpillars and insects in peace. Later in the summer it feeds upon currants, raspberries, elderberries and other kinds of fruit.

The nest is made of straws, rootlets and blades of grass, and occasionally wool and moss are also used, the inside being lined with horsehair. It is generally built a few feet from the ground, in thorn, brier, bramble or gooseberry bushes. Sometimes it may be found amongst nettles, growing peas, or even in rough grass in woods, thick hedgerows, gardens, orchards and shrubberries.

The eggs number four or five, although six may on some occasions be found. They vary in colour from white to greenish white, or yellowish grey, blotched and spotted with varying shades of brown, olive and ash grey.

When you find the nest with chicks in it the parent birds appear to be greatly concerned, and scold you in notes that sound like "*tech.*" You can easily imitate them by tapping two pebbles together.

HOODY CROWS

# The Hoody Crow

THE Hoody, or Grey Crow, as it is frequently called, is a winter visitor to England, but breeds in both Scotland and Ireland. Its habits are in nearly every respect exactly like those of the Carrion Crow, with which it sometimes mates and rears a family.

You cannot mistake this bird very easily for any other, whether you see it at rest or on the wing. It is about twenty inches in length and its head, wings and tail are shining black, whilst the back and underparts are of a smoky grey.

It is detested by gamekeepers because of its bad character as an egg thief, and is therefore ruthlessly trapped and shot.

In Scotland it generally nests on ledges in cliffs, or amongst the long heather on the ground, but in Scandinavia, where it is very numerous, it builds in trees just as the Carrion Crow does in England and Wales. No doubt

in remote ages, when its haunts north of the Tweed were covered with trees, it bred in them, but when the forests disappeared, it adapted itself to conditions as it found them.

The nest is made of sticks, twigs, dry seaweed and heather, with an inner lining of moss, wool, and hair.

The eggs number from three to six, and are greyish green in colour, spotted with different shades of greenish brown.

Baby Grey Crows are very ugly little creatures when they are hatched, but in course of time grow quite handsome.

When they have left the nest, and before they can fly far, they sit about on rocks, and if they should happen to catch sight of one of their parents, ever so far off, up go their heads, and with widely opened mouths they begin to call "*Yah! Yah! Yah!*" In Norway they do this whilst sitting about on the branches of trees, and thus frequently betray their presence.

During hard weather in the winter Hoody Crows may often be seen walking along the seashore looking for food, and it does not matter whether they come upon a dead fish or a tired bird they will make a meal off it.

CHAFFINCHES.

# The Chaffinch

THE Chaffinch is almost as well known as the house sparrow. The bluish ash colour of the male's head and his reddish brown breast, render him almost as striking in appearance as the bullfinch.

In the autumn the males and females of this species separate, and many members of both sexes leave the country altogether and go south in search of a more genial climate. Those that remain with us, however, always seem to be very cheerful whilst they are hopping about in farmyards and gardens in search of seeds.

The male Chaffinch is a great singer, and if the weather be mild and open he begins to try over his ringing little ditty quite early in the spring. His song has been likened to the words, "Will you, will you kiss me, dear?" and at the height of the season is practised over thousands of times every day.

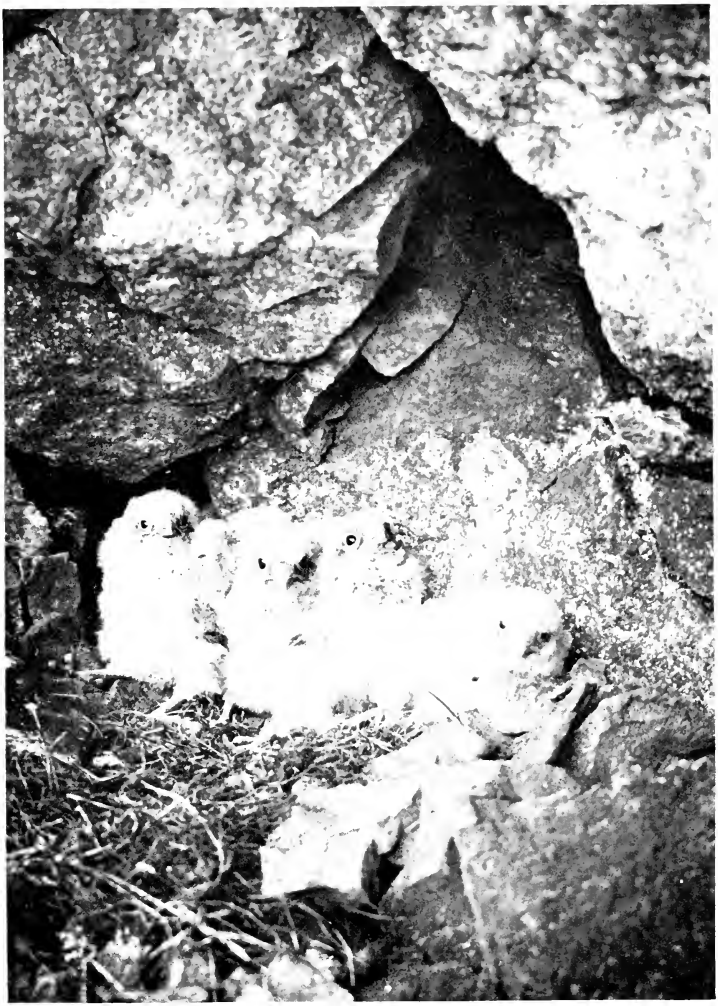
The nest is built in the fork of a small tree, in orchards, woods, rough old hedgerows, on commons, and by streams. It is a beautifully neat and compact little home. The outside is made of moss, wool, lichens, and cobwebs cleverly woven together, and the inside is lined with feathers, hair, and down. Occasionally the structure is decorated on the outside with bits of paper.

From four to six eggs are laid, of a pale greenish blue colour tinged with faint reddish brown, and streaked and spotted with dark reddish brown.

When you find the nest of a Chaffinch the female hardly ever fails to scold you severely if you disturb her. Her ringing notes of protest sound something like "*pink, pink, pink.*"

Baby Chaffinches are not fed upon seeds, but upon caterpillars and insects. They consume great quantities of food, and in consequence keep their parents hard at work all day long long searching for it.

They all resemble their mother in plumage until they moult their first coat of feathers in the autumn, when the males become like their father.



KESTRELS.

# The Kestrel

IF a large bird is seen hovering almost motionless in the air with outspread wings and tail, it is almost certain to be a Kestrel looking for its prey. It is one of the farmer's best friends. Gamekeepers used to think that it was a great enemy of their young pheasants, partridges and grouse, and trapped and shot the bird in the most merciless manner. Now they know better and many of them spare its life.

This species feeds upon mice, voles, frogs, and beetles, but occasionally an individual bird will develop the bad habit of killing and eating chicks.

In many parts of the country the Kestrel is known as the "Windhover." This is a very good common name, because it describes so well the bird's peculiar habit of hanging in the air when scanning the ground below for its prey.

You can frequently see the Kestrel from

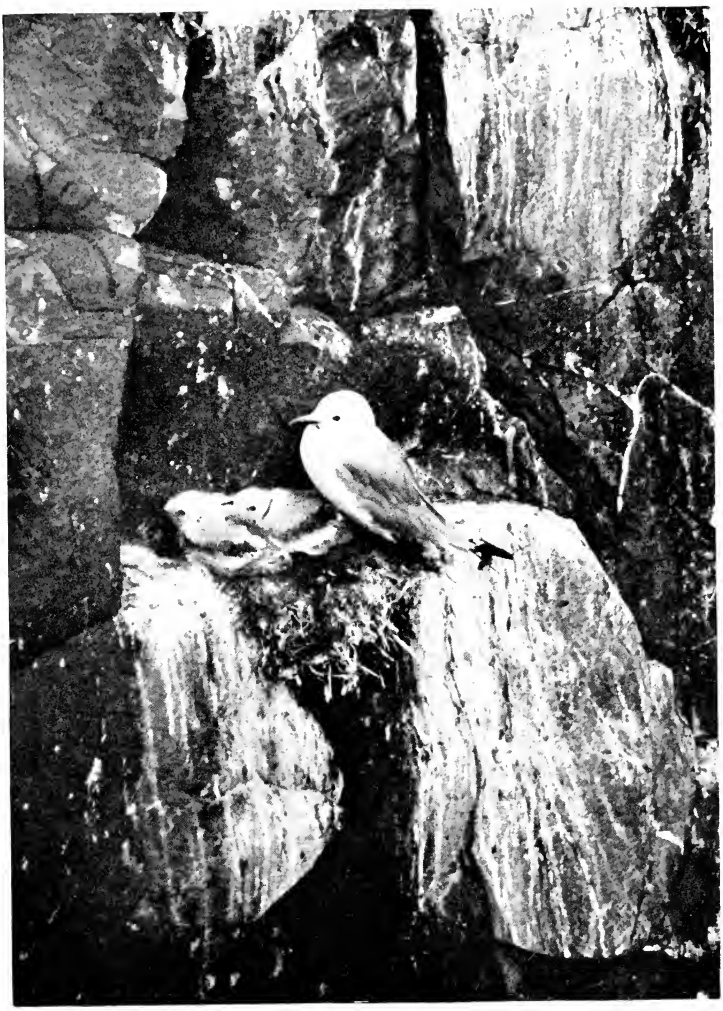
the windows of a railway train as you glide through the country, for although it is a rather shy bird, it is bold enough to sit quite still on a telegraph wire, whilst an express rattles past it at full speed.

The Windhover does not make a nest. She sometimes uses the old home of a magpie or carrion crow, and at others lays her eggs in a hole in a tree, old ruin, or on a ledge, in an overhanging cliff.

From four to seven eggs are laid. These are of a creamy-white colour, thickly blotched and clouded with reddish brown.

Baby Kestrels are covered with a plentiful supply of down, and fed by both parent birds. The writer watched a family of these chicks on one occasion for the whole of a summer's day, and the food brought to the eyrie consisted entirely of voles and beetles.

Upon fledging, young Windhovers scatter and sit about amongst the trees in different parts of a wood. If you remain quite still for half an hour or so, and are well hidden, you will hear them calling "*kek, kek, kek,*" from different quarters. They are hungry and are calling out in order that one or other of their parents may bring them food.



KITTIWAKES.

# The Kittiwake

THE Kittiwake is the smallest gull found breeding in the British Islands, and this fact, coupled with the dusky colour of its legs and feet, will readily help to distinguish it from any other sea-bird found round our coast.

It always breeds on ledges and in crevices of sea cliffs, and is never found nesting on the ground like the common gull.

In St. Kilda, the Shetlands, and on many cliffs round the coast of Ireland, it breeds in countless thousands, and always tells the nature lover its name when he or she comes near its nesting-place, by crying out in a loud penetrating voice two notes that sound like "*kitti-wake, kitti-wake, kitti-wake.*" People who do not know much about birds upon hearing it for the first time think it is someone telling them to "get-away, get-away."

Ever such a narrow ledge or small corner will, as may be seen from our illustration, serve the little Kittiwake for her nest, but

the growing young ones cannot stir about much until they are able to fly. If they were to attempt to do so they would in all probability fall into the sea far below, and be dashed to death by the rough waves beating against the rocks.

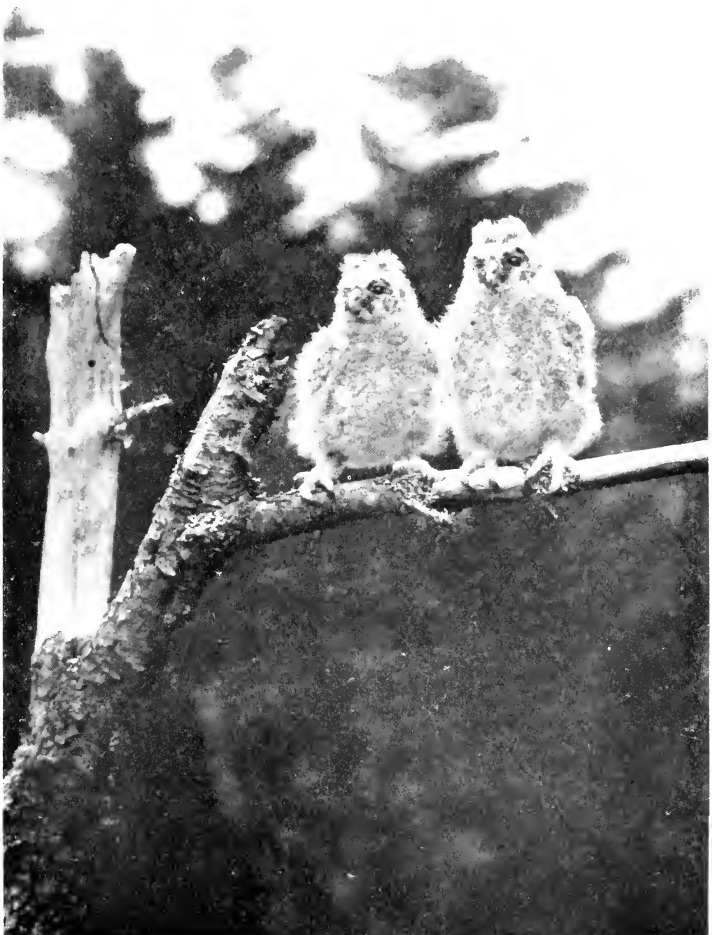
This gull's nest is made of dry seaweed and bits of dead grass. The eggs number from two to four, of a yellow to buffish-brown colour, thickly spotted and blotched with varying shades of brown.

Nestling Kittiwakes are covered with down, which is white on the head and underparts, and buffish coloured on the shoulders and sides. The back is of a greyish tint.

The principal food of this species consists of small fishes that swim near the surface of the sea.

In olden times people used to eat the flesh of this gull and some of them considered it as good as that of the partridge.

Quite recently the wings of young Kittiwakes were in great demand by ladies, who decorated their hats and bonnets with them. It is to be hoped that such a thoughtless practice has quite died out, because it was attended by the most abominable cruelty.



LONG-EARED OWLS.

# The Long-Eared Owl

THIS handsome Owl is commoner than many people imagine. Its habit of hiding by day, in the darkest recesses of pine forests and other unfrequented places, makes it appear rarer than it actually is.

The so-called "long ears" are really not ears at all, but tufts of feathers about an inch and a half in length growing on the top of the head. They can be raised or lowered at will by the bird.

No nest whatever is made by the Long-Eared Owl. If it cannot find the old home of a crow, wood-pigeon, magpie or squirrel, it simply descends to the ground and lays its four or five white oval-shaped eggs in a hollow under a stunted pine or amongst long heather.

The young ones are hatched about the beginning of April in the south of England, but later in Scotland. They are quaint looking little fellows, covered with fluffy white

down. During cold wet weather you will find their mother covering them with her wings, spread out very much like a barn-door fowl brooding a large family of chicks. If she is not doing this you may rely upon it that she is sitting in a tree not far off, intently watching the place where her young ones abide. Should you be lucky enough to find her family, she will most likely surprise you by suddenly emerging from her place of hiding and flying close over your head.

Sometimes in her anger and alarm she will smack her wings together over her back and beneath her body, and if this does not succeed in driving you away she will resort to a very cunning trick. Disappearing from view, she will startle you by screaming out like a rabbit in pain, and upon going in the direction of the distressing sounds, you will in all probability find her lying on the ground with both wings stretched out. This clever ruse has been put into practice in order to draw you away from her young ones.

Long-eared Owls feed their chicks upon voles, rats, mice, and small birds, for which they may frequently be seen hunting during broad daylight.

HERON.

# The Common Heron

THIS is a very easy feathered friend to recognise. It is large in size, and beats its wings at a slower rate than any other British bird.

Whilst in the air it is obliged to stretch its long legs out behind and curve its giraffe-like neck in order to balance itself.

During the breeding season Herons congregate in some wood or plantation, and build their large nests of sticks, twigs, rootlets and grass near the tops of the trees.

They do not always breed in colonies, for occasionally a solitary pair of birds may be found nesting on a ledge in the face of a sea cliff, or even upon the ground. Their eggs number from three to five and are of a pale greenish-blue colour.

Baby Herons are covered with down. That growing upon their heads is long and shaggy, and makes them look like wee Skye terriers. In cool weather they huddle to-

gether in the nest for warmth, until, at a little distance, they look just like one bundle of fluffy down. They are fed upon eels, frogs, trout and other kinds of fish, and, when they sit up to receive their food, look very ungainly.

Our illustration shows a young Heron that has just fledged, but is not able to fly very far.

When the breeding season is over Herons scatter up and down the countryside, and may frequently be seen fishing in ponds, by the sea-shore, and in the shallow parts of rivers. They do not dive and swim after their prey in the same way that cormorants do, but just stand still in the water until a fish swims close to them. Then the long neck is darted out, and the Heron's lance-like bill is driven right through the body of the unwary victim.

A Heron is gifted with plenty of patience, and will sometimes stand stock-still in one place for hours. If a water-rat is rash enough to swim past, it is all the same to the bird, he is speared through the head, shaken free and then swallowed whole without any trouble.

COLE TIT.

# The Cole Tit

IF care is not exercised one is liable at first sight to mistake this bird for its less widely distributed relative, the Marsh Tit. Both are of about the same size and general appearance, and their habits do not differ very widely. There is, however, one point of difference which secures the identity of each. The Marsh Tit is all black on the crown and back of the head, whereas the Cole Tit has a broad white mark running down the back of its head.

The call notes, too, differ, but it would be hard to describe to what extent in words; experience in the woods alone can reveal this.

The Cole Tit is a frequenter of plantations, woods and spinneys, where you may see it busy the livelong day industriously examining crevices and crannies in the trunks and branches of trees for larvæ.

It does not matter to this nimble little

gymnast whether it is standing on a branch, clinging upside down underneath it, or swinging at the very tip of a long slender twig, it is equally at home and always happy and vivacious.

Insects form the chief food of this species during the spring and summer, but throughout the autumn and winter, seeds, berries, and the kernels of nuts become acceptable. It is readily attracted to the garden by hanging out a meat bone or the kernels of Barcelona nuts.

The Cole Tit makes its nest in holes in trees, stumps, old walls and dry banks. It is built of dead grass, moss, wool, hair, feathers and down.

The eggs number from five to as many even as ten, although seven or eight may generally be found. They are white with light red spots and freckles, and bear a remarkable resemblance to those of the Marsh Tit. The sitting bird hisses like a snake, if molested.

Young Cole Tits wear the distinguishing white mark of their species at the back of the head, as soon as they grow their feathers.

HEDGE SPARROWS.

# The Hedge Sparrow

THIS familiar little bird is not a sparrow at all, as may readily be seen from the appearance of its slender bill. It really belongs to the Warbler family.

It hops about in gardens, orchards, parks, and woods all the summer long, picking up caterpillars and insects.

The male never seems to be tired of rattling off his sweet and merry little song. Whether it be in error or simply an overflowing of the joy within his little heart it is impossible to say, but he occasionally breaks into song at night-time.

In the winter Hedge Sparrows leave the woods and alter their diet. As there are very few insects to be found they hop round fowl-runs, farmyards, and dwelling-houses, in search of seeds, crumbs, and other trifles.

You can always be sure of the call-note of the Hedge Sparrow. It is a plaintive and rather shrill "*peep-peep.*"

People who dislike the name of Sparrow for this species call it the Hedge Accentor, and in many parts of the country it is known as the "Dunnock."

The nest is made of slender twigs, rootlets, dead grass and moss; the inside being neatly lined with pieces of wool, hair, feathers, and down. Slender twigs are only used sparingly for the foundations, and are sometimes absent altogether. It is a very pretty sight to watch a Hedge Sparrow lining her nest. She places each piece of hair or down where she intends it to stay, and then twirling round and round presses her breast against the inside of the structure, thus giving the lining a smooth felt-like appearance.

The eggs are of a beautiful turquoise blue colour and number from four to six.

Baby Hedge Accentors grow very quickly, and when they leave the nest scatter and tell their parents where to find them with food by constantly calling in low sweet notes. The chicks shown in the accompanying illustration belonged to a second brood reared in the same nest, and only fledged when the apples in the writer's orchard were quite large at the end of July.

WILLOW GROUSE.

# The Willow Grouse

THE Willow Grouse or Ripa is not found in the British Islands, although it inhabits the northern portions of both the Old and the New World. Many people consider that our red grouse is only a local representative of this species and that it does not turn white in winter because our mild open climate renders such a change in the colour of its plumage unnecessary.

Although the summer plumage of the Ripa is very similar to that of the red grouse, the flight feathers are always white and make the bird look very conspicuous when it rises and flies away from the observer. In winter the whole of its feathers become pure white excepting the outer tail quills, which, curiously enough, remain black.

The call notes are exactly like those of the red grouse, and if you heard them, with your eyes closed, you might easily imagine yourself on a Scottish moor.

The Willow Grouse is found where birch and willow trees grow amongst heather and juniper. In Norway it inhabits the mountain sides above where the fir trees grow and the capercaillie and black grouse live, and below the bare ridges where the ptarmigan is found. Unlike the red grouse, this species generally roosts in trees.

The nest of the Willow Grouse is made on the ground amongst heather and juniper bushes. It consists of a slight hollow very scantily lined with small pieces of dead, dry vegetation.

The eggs are very similar in all respects to those of the red grouse, and the chicks do not differ in appearance.

If you suddenly come upon a mother Willow Grouse brooding her chicks she commences to run round and round you, flapping her wings as if injured and unable to fly. This clever ruse is practised in order to attract your attention and give her young ones an opportunity of scattering and hiding in the undergrowth. No sooner have they done this than their mother mounts the air and flies off.

WHEATEARS.

# The Wheatear

THE Wheatear is a stout little bird about six inches in length. The top of its head, nape, and back are of a bluish grey colour tinged with light brown. The end of its body and upper part of the tail are pure white. That is why the bird looks like a large snowflake when flying away from you in a dull light. A streak over the eye, its wings, and the tip of its tail are nearly black. Chin and throat are dull white, and the underparts creamy white. The female is browner and duller in colour generally.

This bird loves wild moorland country where rocks and solitude are to be found ; it is frequently, however, met with inhabiting pastures and arable land in the North. It has a habit of perching on stone walls and rocks and waiting until you walk quite close to it, then flying on in front of you and alighting on some large stone or knoll near which you are almost sure to pass. Whilst

it is waiting for you it will often behave in a manner suggestive of anger. Ducking its body, drooping its wings, and spreading out its tail for an instant, it utters a note sounding like "*chick, chack.*"

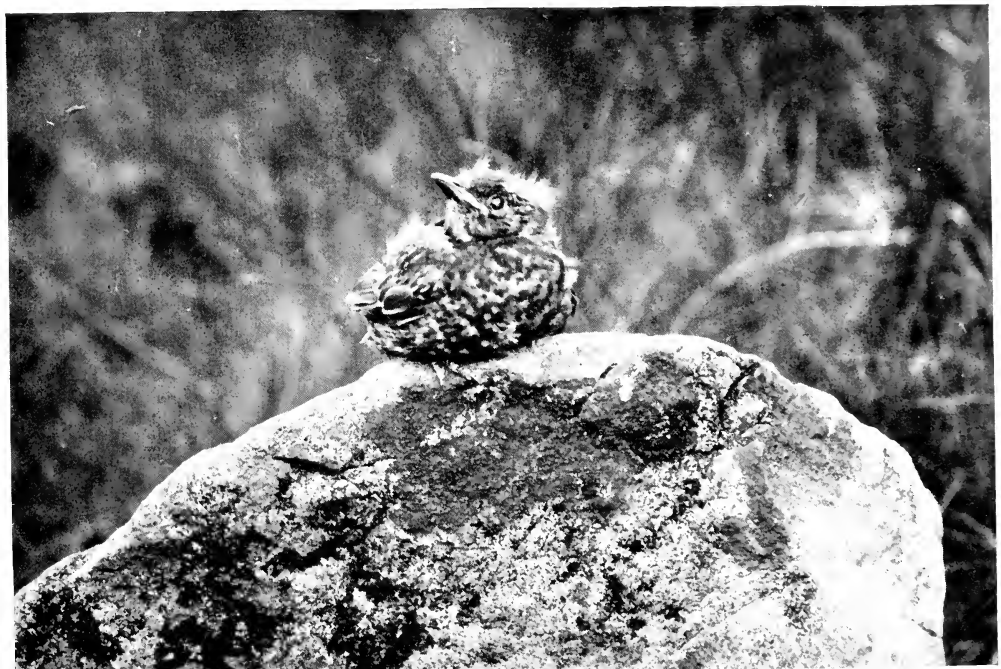
The Wheatear is not a very accomplished vocalist, but his song is pretty and generally delivered on the wing.

A hole amongst rocks, in a stone wall, bank, or old peat stack is used as a nesting place. The structure is formed of rootlets, dry grass, and moss, with an inner lining of wool, hair, feathers, or rabbit's down.

The eggs number five or six, and are pale greenish blue in colour.

Young Wheatears are fed by both parent birds upon caterpillars, moths, beetles, and all kinds of insects. They do not leave the nest until they can fly quite strongly, but very soon learn to find their own food and take care of themselves.

During July Wheatears gradually work their way south, and leave us for their winter quarters in Africa and other warm countries, to appear again, if the weather should be mild and open, as early as February or March.



RING OUZEL

# The Ring Ouzel

THE Ring Ouzel is a bird of lonely crag-strewn glens and solitary mountain-sides. In size and shape it is very much like the common blackbird. Its plumage is dull black, the intensity of which is modified by many of the feathers being edged with dark grey. Across the breast is a broad crescent of pure white, hence its common name of Ring Ouzel. The female is similar in appearance to the male, except for the facts that she is somewhat lighter coloured, and the crescent on her chest is narrower and of a dirty white.

The Rock Thrush, as it is sometimes called, arrives in England in April. It is occasionally seen close to London during its spring migration, and in the neighbourhood of Brighton and other towns on the South Coast in September and October, during its autumn journey to southern Europe, where it spends the winter. It breeds in nearly all districts

suiting its habits, in the west and north of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

During the spring and summer its food consists of worms, snails, grubs, and beetles, but in the autumn it varies this diet with all kinds of berries, and is especially fond of those of the mountain ash, for which it will enter even the front gardens of houses in large towns during its autumn migration.

The nest is built in all kinds of situations. Sometimes quite on the ground, and at others in a hole in an old stone wall, on a ledge in a small cliff, amongst heather growing on a steep bank, and, upon rare occasions, in a holly bush. The structure is an exact imitation of that of the blackbird, but is, of course, found in more solitary localities.

The eggs number four or five, of a bluish green colour, freckled and spotted with brown. The markings are, as a rule, larger and farther apart than those found on the eggs of the blackbird.

The young ones in their first plumage do not resemble either of their parents. There is no white crescent on the breast, which is a mixture of black and sandy buff.

SPOONBILLS.

# The Spoonbill

THE Spoonbill measures about two feet eight inches in length, when full grown. Its plumage is white all over, except on the crown of the head and part of the neck, where a buffish tinge is observable. At the back of the head the feathers are considerably lengthened and form a magnificent crest. In olden times this beautiful bird used to breed in Norfolk and Suffolk, and even as close to London as Fulham. It was banished, however, by the drainage of many of its favourite marshes, and, it is to be feared, the too free use of guns. Small flocks still visit the Norfolk coast during the spring and summer, and form an interesting sight on Breydon Broad, close to Great Yarmouth. Here they evidently appreciate the watchfulness of the seagulls, for they like to take a nap or feed in the society of these wary birds.

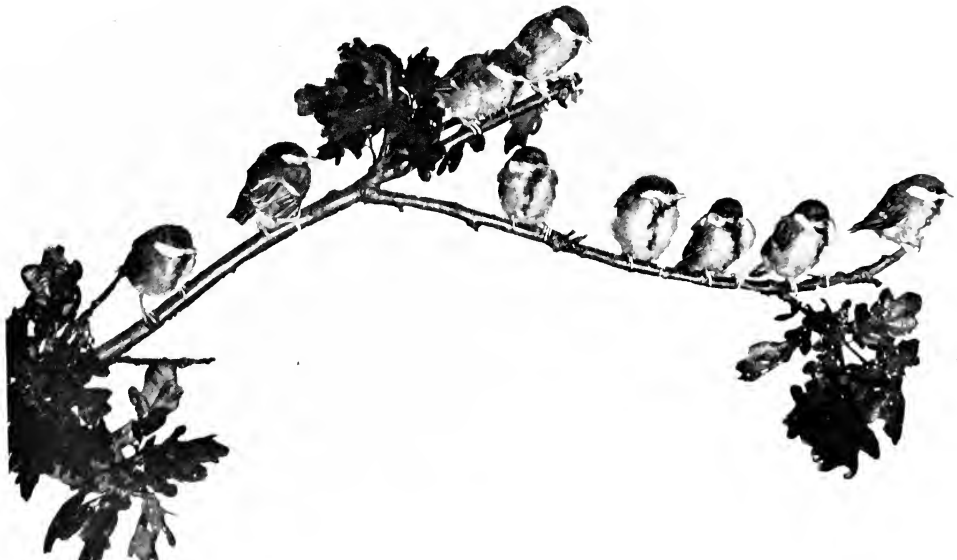
The Spoonbill is fond of frequenting

mud flats, where it feeds upon water-snails, small fishes, frogs, insects, and the buds and leaves of water-plants. During flight flocks of these birds travel in single file with outstretched necks and legs. The species arrives in Europe as a rule during the month of April, and after breeding in Holland, Spain, and other countries, retires southward again in September and October.

The nest is made of a few dead reeds formed into a rough kind of platform, a few inches above the water in some swamp. In India this bird breeds in trees along with herons, just as it used to do in England in olden times. Five or six eggs, of a dull, chalky white, spotted and streaked with reddish brown, are laid.

The nestlings are covered with white down and are fed by their parents in the same way that young pigeons are fed. Proportionately their bills are not so large as those of the old birds, and are, as might be expected, softer in texture.

It is easy to see from our illustration why this bird has had given to it the common name of Spoonbill. In Norfolk it is also known as the "Banjo-bill."



GREAT TITS.

# The Great Tit

THIS is the largest and most handsome member of the Titmouse family inhabiting our country. His black head, white cheeks, olive green back, and yellow underparts divided from the chin downwards by a black line render him quite unmistakable even to the most careless observer. The male is easily distinguished from the female by the fact that the black line down the centre of his breast is broader and more defined.

The Great Tit, or Oxeye, as it is frequently called, is common in orchards, gardens, woods, plantations, and wherever trees and shrubs abound. It feeds upon grubs, caterpillars, and insects in summer, but in winter will readily devour the kernels of hazel nuts, which it splits by repeatedly hammering with its powerful bill, Indian corn thrown down in woods for pheasants and almost any other kind of grain. Along with other tits it can

be attracted to the garden by hanging out a meat bone, a coco-nut divided into two, or the kernels of Barcelona nuts. It is a strong, active, fearless bird, with a call note something like that of the chaffinch, "*pink, pink.*" In the springtime this is varied by another, highly suggestive of the sounds made by the process of sharpening a saw with a file.

The nest is built in holes in trees, old walls, underneath plant pots standing upside down in gardens, and occasionally in the old home of a crow, magpie, or even that of a blackbird. The writer has on two occasions found a Great Tit sitting on a clutch of eggs laid in the old home of the last mentioned bird, which had been lined with rabbits' down. It is made of dry grass, moss, hair, wool, and feathers, and two broods are sometimes reared in the same structure in a season.

The eggs are white spotted and freckled with pale red marks, and, as a rule, number seven or eight, although as many as twelve may upon occasion be found.

The chicks are fed by both parent birds, and a few days before fledging become very noisy in their clamourings for food.

COMMON GULLS

# The Common Gull

THE Common Gull is very much like the herring gull in appearance. Its head and neck are snowy white and the back and wings pearl grey, the latter tipped with black and white. The under parts are pure white. It is, however, only some eighteen inches in length and has yellowish green legs, whereas the herring gull is about twenty-four inches long and has flesh-coloured legs.

Although plentiful all round our coast during the winter, this species, curiously enough, rarely breeds either in England or Wales, in spite of the fact that it does so commonly in certain parts of Scotland and in the north and west of Ireland.

The nest is built amongst heather and coarse grass, on ledges and in crevices of rocks on the sea-shore, and upon islands in both salt and fresh water lochs. It is made of heather, dry seaweed and grass, and is fre-

quently a rather bulky structure. In Scotland, where small islands abound in some of the great sea lochs, the Common Gull is often robbed by rats, so large and fierce, that they occasionally kill and eat the sitting bird on her nest.

From two to four eggs are laid, although the number found is generally three. These are buffish brown or dark olive brown in colour, marked with dark brown blotches and spots.

Young Common Gulls soon leave the nest and squat about in the heather or grass, not far from where they have been hatched. They are fed upon scraps of fish, worms and grubs, and the writer has seen their parents visit a heronry near the sea, in order to pick up any unconsidered trifle dropped by their neighbours. One gull actually had the boldness to alight on the edge of a nest containing three young herons, and seize a piece of fish, with which it flew off.

When they are old enough to fly for a short distance their mother takes great pains to prevent them from wandering near any place she considers dangerous.

STONECHATS.

# The Stonechat

THE Stonechat inhabits furze-clad commons, and rough, uncultivated tracts of land where juniper, bracken, and bramble grow in profusion. Unless care is taken the female of this species may easily be mistaken for its relative the whinchat.

The male is about five inches in length; its head, nape, throat, back, wings, and tail are black, with rusty edgings to many of the feathers. On the sides of the neck, wings, and at the root of the tail, are patches of white. The breast and under parts are dark rust colour. The female is sandy brown on her head and back, streaked with black; the white patches on her neck and wings are not so large and conspicuous as in her mate, and the base of her tail is rusty red. You can distinguish her from the whinchat, if you take care to remember that the latter bird has a white spot at the base of its tail and no black on the throat.

The Stonechat is fond of perching on the tops of furze and other bushes, but never stays long in one place, fluttering in the air to catch some passing insect, or descending to the ground to pick up a grub. Its call-note sounds like "*u-tack*," and its short, soft, low song is frequently delivered on the wing.

A good many Stonechats stay with us all the year round.

The nest is very difficult to find, and both parent birds guard their secret by trying to decoy intruders away from its presence. It is situated on or near the ground amongst heather, rough tangled grass, or at the foot of a gorse bush, and is built of rootlets, dry grass and moss, with an inner lining of hair, wool, or feathers.

From four to six, or even seven, eggs are laid. These are pale bluish green in colour, spotted round the larger end with reddish brown.

The young ones fledge before they are able to fly very far, and sit about amongst the furze bushes or heather, calling from different quarters to their parents for food, and the old birds may be seen alighting first in one place and then another, with insects.

SKYLARKS.

# The Skylark

POETS of all ages have loved the Skylark, and praised its wonderful song in many a pretty line. Its habits of rising early in the morning and singing whilst it mounts the air have given writers of verse a great opportunity of displaying their descriptive powers.

In Scotland this bird is called the Laverock, and Burns, who had every chance, in his early days, of making himself acquainted with its ways, wrote of it—

> "The waken'd laverock, warbling, springs,
> And climbs the early sky
> Winnowing blithe her dewy wings
> In morning's rosy eye."

The Skylark is larger than any of the pipits found breeding in this country, and not easily mistaken for its much rarer relative the woodlark. The latter bird is smaller, has a much shorter tail, and a noticeable light yellowish streak running over its eye.

This favourite songster is common all over

the British Islands during the spring and summer, and in the winter its numbers are swollen by the arrival of great flocks from the colder parts of Europe.

The cock commences to sing as early as the month of February, if the weather should be mild and open, and towards the end of the breeding season may sometimes be heard whilst he is standing on the ground or perched on a bush. His song is full of melody and delight, but is occasionally marred by notes borrowed from other birds.

The nest is made on the ground in the shelter of a tuft of grass or heath. In fallow fields it may be found quite in the open. It is built of dry grass and rootlets. Sometimes a few horse-hairs are used for lining it.

Four or five eggs of a dirty white colour, thickly spotted with varying shades of brown, are laid.

Baby Skylarks have little tufts of down on their heads and backs when they are hatched, and do not see for several days. They are fed by both parent birds, and when they fledge, scatter in the grass or amongst the clods, and soon begin to try to find food for themselves.

COMMON CURLEW.

# The Curlew

THE Curlew's favourite resorts in winter-time are the extensive sand flats and mud banks found round our coast. Here it can follow the receding tide and use its six inches or more of downward curved bill to its heart's content, probing for worms and other creatures upon which it feeds. In passing it may be mentioned that the bird finds it long bill very useful during the summer-time, in extracting dung beetles from their tunnels in the ground.

When the flowing tide has covered the Curlew's feeding ground, the bird flies off to some field in the open country not far off, and waits patiently until the ebb has left the sand flats and mud banks bare again.

If you are not careful you may mistake the whimbrel or May fowl for the Curlew. It is similar in appearance, but smaller, and has a different note.

About the end of March or beginning

of April, Curlews leave the seashore, and resort to the fells, moors, and uplands, where they pair for the breeding season. It is then you hear to perfection their wild, musical notes, the commonest of which sounds like "*corlieu*" or "*curlew.*"

The nest is made on the ground, and consists of a few short bits of dead grass, or rushes placed in a slight hollow.

Four eggs are nearly always laid, although on some occasions only three are found. They are olive green, or brownish buff, marked with blackish brown, and dark green spots.

Baby Curlews are covered with down and leave the nest directly they are hatched, and, as they are strong and long in the leg, are well equipped for walking about in the grass, short heather, or rushes. Curiously enough, when young, their bills are neither long nor curved, as you will see from the accompanying illustration.

If the mother bird should see anything dangerous approaching whilst her young ones are running about with her, she sounds her alarm note and they all instantly crouch down and hide.

JACKDAW

# The Jackdaw

A JACKDAW may be easily distinguished from a rook, even at a distance, because he is smaller and beats his wings faster as he flies. He is very fond of telling his name to everybody and keeps calling "*Jack*" as he flies. Close at hand the leaden grey feathers on the back of his head and neck are very noticeable.

Nearly every church tower in small towns and villages affords breeding accommodation for the Jackdaw, and in such conditions it may be seen any day strutting along the streets in search of food, or diligently surveying rubbish heaps for any kind of edible scraps they may yield.

On the other hand large colonies may be found breeding in holes in the face of some cliff, situated at quite a considerable distance from the dwellings of man. It has been written that Jackdaws never breed in the branches of trees, but this is not quite

accurate, as they do so in a thick spruce wood in Cumberland. Holes in cliffs, old ruins, church steeples, barns and trees are favourite nesting situations. Sometimes a chimney is selected.

The nest is made of sticks, twigs, moss, wool, feathers, or whatever else happens to come to hand. Sometimes it is a huge structure, and at others quite a slight affair. The writer has known a pair of Jackdaws build a tower of sticks three feet high on the loft of a barn, so as to have the top near their entrance hole through the wall. Another pair had taken possession of a crude nest, made for them by a small boy, of twigs and wool in a hole in one of the walls of the same building.

Three to six eggs are laid of a pale greenish blue, spotted and speckled with dark brown and grey.

Young Jackdaws are noisy birds, and generally betray their presence by constantly asking for food, and positively clamouring when one or other of their parents returns home. When the fledglings leave the nest they generally sit about in trees for a few days.

GREY LAG GEESE.

# The Grey Lag Goose

THIS is the only member of the Goose family that breeds in the British Islands. In olden times it used to live all the year round in the Fen districts of Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, and is supposed to have derived its common name from the facts that it is grey in colour and lagged behind other species of wild geese to breed. Drainage of its old strongholds, and a greatly increased human population, have long since banished it as a breeding bird, and it is now only found nesting sparingly in the North-west Highlands, and more numerously in the Outer Hebrides. In the latter part of the country the writer has found in one day as many as half a dozen nests containing eggs. When they become too numerous the Crofters, or small farmers, complain of the damage done by the geese treading down their uncut corn.

The Grey Lag Goose feeds upon grain,

picked up in stubble fields, grass, and different kinds of water plants. When flying in a flock, the birds generally travel in the shape of the letter V with the sharp base point of the letter going first >.

A curious feature in the life of this bird is, that it moults so rapidly, that for a time it has not sufficient feathers in its wings to lift its heavy body from the ground. At this season it either goes into hiding, or takes to large sheets of open water for safety.

The nest is made in deep heather, tall rough grass, rushes or osiers. It is formed of dead flags, heather or rushes, and is lined with plentiful supplies of down and feathers plucked from the bird's own body. Upon leaving the nest of her own accord, the old female covers her eggs carefully with down; this keeps them warm whilst she is away.

The eggs number from five to nine, and are of a yellowish or creamy white colour.

Young Grey Lag Geese are covered with down, and leave the nest almost directly after they are hatched. It is a very pretty sight to watch an old bird of this species proudly swimming in a Highland loch, with her family following in single file close behind her.

BROWN OWL.

# The Brown or Tawny Owl

THIS is the bird we hear during winter nights calling in woods like someone lost. Its loud eerie notes "*tu-whit tu-whoo*" may be heard in different parts of England, Wales, and Scotland, but not in Ireland. Occasionally it hoots during broad light of day. The bird has yet another name, Wood Owl, which is also a very suitable one because it is a lover of woods, forests, and parks where hollow old trees abound.

The Brown Owl feeds upon rats, voles, mice, moles, and young rabbits, which it seizes in its strong, sharp claws whilst they are abroad feeding or playing in the twilight.

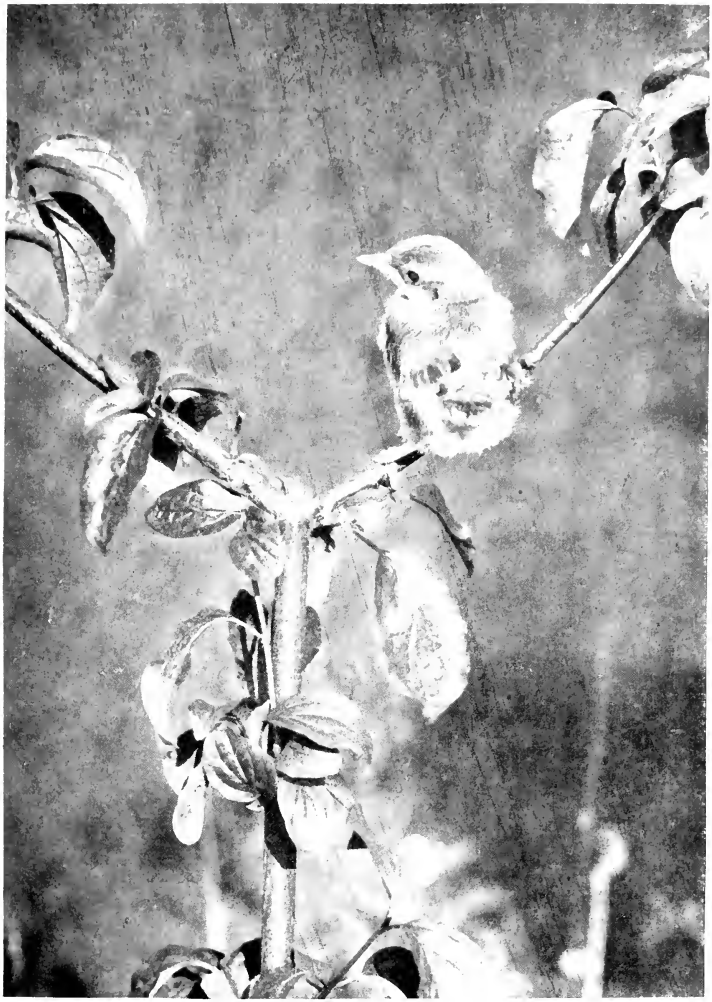
Some people think that owls can find their prey when it is pitch dark, and that they cannot see at all in broad daylight. They are wrong in both cases. Owls cannot see in absolute darkness any more than boys and girls can, but they are able to do so in daylight, although they prefer to sit and

slumber with closed eyes in some shady place until dusk. Their sight is specially adapted for seeing things in half darkness, and they easily capture small birds roosting in trees and bushes. This is why blackbirds, chaffinches, and other feathered dwellers in woods mob the Brown Owl when they come upon him asleep by day.

An owl's feathers are covered with fine soft down. For this reason you do not hear the bird's wings when it flies close over your head, and it is enabled to steal upon its prey unnoticed.

The Brown Owl does not make a nest of any kind. It lays its three or four white eggs in a hollow tree, cleft of rock in a cliff, or a hole in the wall of some old building.

Baby owls are clothed in beautiful white fluffy down, and when you find a brood of these chicks, you will notice that they all differ in size, just as the members of a family of four or five boys and girls do. The fact is, owls do not lay their eggs as quickly as other birds. They rest two or three days between each, and in consequence, the first chick is hatched quite a long time before the last one of the brood.



LESSER WHITETHROAT.

# The Lesser Whitethroat

THIS little bird is far less numerous than its better known relative, the Common or Greater Whitethroat. You are most likely to meet with it in the south and east of England, whither it will return to a favourite haunt in a thick old hedgerow, year after year, with the utmost regularity.

It is a little over five inches in length, light slaty grey in colour on its head, and greyish brown on its upper parts. The wing and tail feathers are dusky, edged with greyish brown, whereas in the case of its larger and better known relative, these feathers are bordered with chestnut brown. The throat and under parts are white, faintly tinged on the breast and sides with pink.

The Lesser Whitethroat, like many other members of the Warbler family, spends the winter in southern Europe and northern Africa. Upon arriving in England in the

spring it resorts to the most secluded hedgerows, old lanes, and thickets where it may be seen by the quiet observer hopping about from twig to twig carefully examining the under side of leaf after leaf, in quick succession for insects. If it happens to catch sight of you it will at once retire, and most likely scold you for intruding upon its privacy.

It is not a very accomplished musician, but during sultry weather practises its notes so persistently that they become monotonous to some listeners.

The nest is generally built in a position higher than that chosen by the Common Whitethroat, but it is not so deep inside. It is made of dead grass stems and cobwebs, lined with horsehair or fine rootlets.

The four or five eggs are white or light creamy white in colour, slightly tinged with green, and spotted with ash grey and greenish brown.

The chicks are very shy, and will hop out of the nest and make their way through the bramble or blackthorn bush, in which they have been reared, even before they are able to fly.

ROBINS.

# The Robin

WHO does not know and love Robin Redbreast? His gay appearance and bold confiding manners endear him to young and old alike. In the winter when Jack Frost reigns supreme he frequents our window-sills and doorsteps, with an air and attitude that tell us quite plainly he not only wishes but expects to be fed, and in the springtime he repays our kindness by ridding the garden of all the injurious grubs and insects he can find.

A cock Robin is not easily distinguished from a hen of the species. He is just a trifle larger and his colours are somewhat brighter, that is all. Many boys and girls have an idea that a wren is a female Robin, and an old poet, making the same great mistake, has written:

> "The robin and the wren
> Are God Almighty's 'cock and hen.'"

Robins are noted for the very odd places in which they sometimes build their

nests. The interiors of tea-pots, coffee-pots, biscuit boxes, water cans, and even the husks of coco-nuts are sometimes chosen. The rusty water-can shown in our colour photograph was lying on its side some yards away from a newly-trimmed hedge, and one day a cow walking along knocked it over by accident with her foot, and all the baby birds rolled out on the grass, but were instantly replaced by the writer.

Many people believe that when young Robins grow up they kill their parents, but, of course, this is entirely wrong. The fact is that when young birds are quite able to take care of themselves, the old ones drive them forth to find new homes.

Children who have seen Redbreasts engaged in fierce encounters will be glad to learn something of the other side of their character. In the springtime a cock Robin has been seen engaged in the charitable work of feeding baby thrushes.

Young Robins in their first coat of feathers do not at all resemble their parents. Instead of having scarlet breasts their feathers are a mixture of dark and light brown.

BLACKBIRDS.

# The Blackbird

IN the North of England this very familiar bird is known as the Black Ouzel, and in Scotland as the Merle.

The most careless boy or girl must have noticed how widely the hen differs in appearance from the cock. Instead of being deep black all over, she is dark rusty brown, mottled on the throat and breast with lighter tints of the same colour. Neither is her bill yellow all over like that of her mate.

We often see or hear about a pied Blackbird. In some cases the bird will have white marks on different parts of its body, and in others it will be white all over, with black spots and patches here and there.

Male Blackbirds sing generally during the morning and evening. A warm spring shower will, however, induce them to pour forth sweet music during any hour of the day.

Some people say they cannot distinguish the notes of this bird from those of the song-

thrush. Those of the former are rich, flute-like melodious strains delivered in an easy, slow manner, whilst those of the latter are ringing, hurried messages of hope that the singer is determined you shall hear and not forget.

The Blackbird builds its nest in evergreens, thorn bushes, hedges, small trees, holes in old stone walls, on beams in sheds, and almost anywhere and everywhere. It is made of small twigs, rootlets, straws, moss and mud, and lined with fine dead grass. From four to six dull, bluish-green eggs thickly spotted with reddish brown and grey are laid.

When well-fed the nestlings grow with surprising quickness, and the parent birds sometimes rear as many as three broods in a season.

The male helps the female to find food for the little ones in the nest, and between delivering one catch of worms and going in search of another, he often mounts some tall tree and gives vent to his happiness in a few mellow notes.

If any accident should deprive the baby Blackbirds of their mother, the father bird will rear the little family by himself.

NIGHTINGALES.

# The Nightingale

THIS wee brown bird, only some six inches in length, is considered the most wonderful feathered musician in the world. Its superb song has been praised by writers of all ages and all countries. Many people who ought to know better think that the exquisite notes of the Nightingale are only uttered at night. Of course, this is a great mistake, as the bird frequently sings by day, but its voice is to some extent drowned in the full chorus of the woods, and is therefore not noticed by unpractised ears.

Arriving in the south of England during April, male Nightingales soon make for their favourite old haunts in woods, spinneys, gardens, thick old hedgerows and other shady retreats. They are followed by the females a few days later.

Curiously enough, this bird, without any reason known to man, will sometimes utterly desert a favourite wood for years

and then suddenly return and inhabit it again.

The Nightingale is closely related to the robin, and the two birds are very similar in pose, and also in disposition and habits. If their eggs are exchanged they will rear each other's chicks without any difficulty.

The nest of this species is made of dry grass stems, dead leaves, moss, and rootlets, with an inner lining of fine dry grass and horsehair. It is built on or close to the ground near a stump, trunk of a tree, or in a bank. Four, five, or even as many as six eggs are laid, of a dark olive green or olive brown colour.

The nestlings are fed by both parent birds upon small caterpillars, moths, flies, and all kinds of insects. The male Nightingale generally ceases to sing as soon as the chicks are hatched. The writer has, however, on more than one occasion, heard one sing immediately after having fed the chicks.

Young birds of this species are, in their first coats of feathers, somewhat similar in appearance to fledgling robins. During July and August young and old wing their way south for the winter.

STARLING.

# The Starling

NEARLY everybody knows the Starling, for it is almost as common as the house sparrow. Although an alert, wary bird, it is by no means shy, especially during the breeding season, or severe weather in the winter, when it will visit gardens and contend with any other feathered pensioner for a share of our bounty. At such seasons the bird is especially fond of fragments of soaked dog biscuit.

The Starling feeds upon worms, grubs, beetles and all kinds of injurious insects, but in the cherry season it varies this diet by visiting gardens and orchards in search of dessert, to the anger of their owners, who do not, alas! always remember the old adage that "one good turn deserves another."

Flocks of Starlings may often be seen feeding near sheep. Sometimes the birds alight on the backs of these animals, hence the name "Sheepster" we often hear this

species called by farmers in the north of England.

As a singer the Starling does not rank very high. It will stand on a chimney-pot or tree-top excitedly shuffling its wings and with puffed-out throat feathers imitate other birds' notes, but has very few of its own.

The nest is made of straw, hay, rootlets, feathers, wool, pieces of string, or whatever else may come in handy, and is placed in holes in trees, roofs of houses, crevices of rock, and amongst loose stones lying on steep hillsides.

The eggs are pale blue in colour and number four, five, or six in a clutch.

Young Starlings do not resemble their parents in appearance. Instead of being black, with green, purple, and bronzy sheen reflections, they are of a uniform dull greyish brown above and brownish white underneath.

Nestling Starlings are always very hungry and very noisy, and when they fledge one family joins another, until by the height of summer we see great flocks going to roost every evening, in some favourite wood or shrubbery.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL.

# The Great Black-backed Gull

THERE are two Black-backed Gulls found breeding in the British Islands—the Lesser and the Great. They are very similar in appearance, but the bird under notice may be readily distinguished by its greater size and the fact that its legs and feet are flesh-coloured, whereas those of the Lesser Black are yellow.

The Great Black Back is our largest sea-gull. It measures nearly thirty inches in length and has a wing expanse of close upon six feet, but is far less numerous than its smaller relative. It is a terrible robber, and will feed upon fish, the eggs and young of other birds, and almost any kind of carrion. Its strength is so great that it has been known to fly off with a dead lamb.

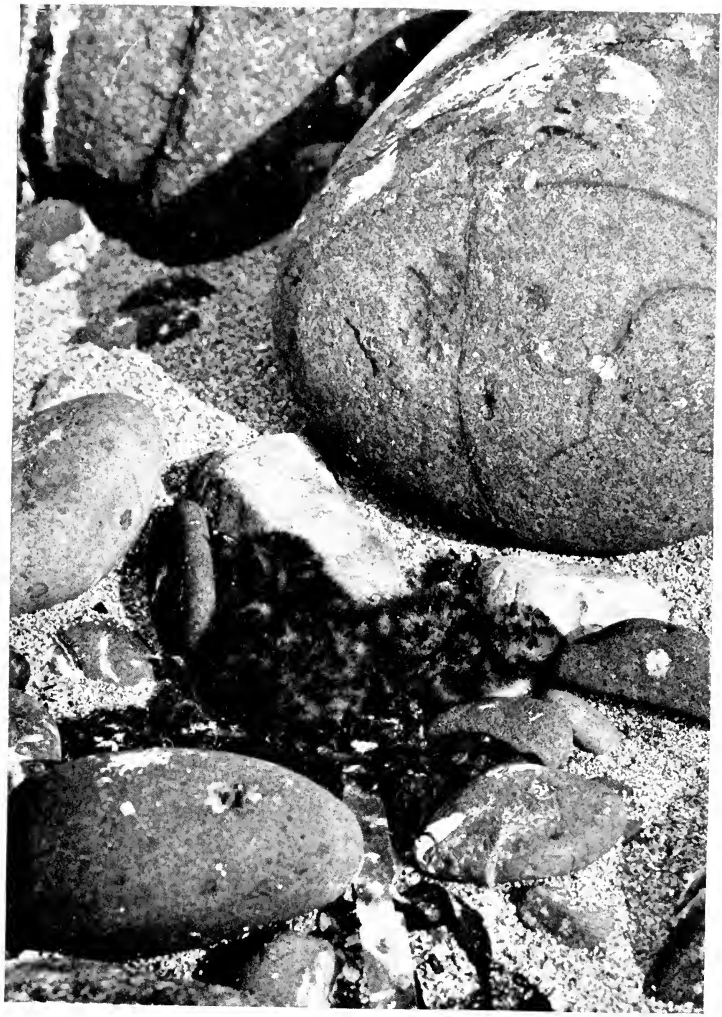
Ledges of sea cliffs, the tops of ocean rock stacks, the highest points of small islands

in the sea, and large fresh-water lochs, and marshes on moors are chosen by this species for breeding places.

The nest is made of seaweed, heather, wool, and grass. Sometimes the structure is very bulky and untidy, and at others a mere hollow in the ground, lined with a few blades of dead grass.

This species generally lays three eggs, although upon occasion two only may be found in a nest. They vary from yellowish brown to light olive in ground colour, and are marked with dark brown and slaty grey blotches.

The nestlings are covered with ashy grey down, marked especially on the head with blackish brown. They leave the nest soon after being hatched, if the situation provides room for them to do so, and run about with great freedom and strength. Their parents are very wary and watchful, and if they observe a boat approaching they at once sound a hoarse alarm-note, and the young birds either hide in the vegetation or squeeze their bodies into some fissure in the rock and remain absolutely still.



ARCTIC TERNS.

# The Arctic Tern

THIS is one of the five Terns or Sea Swallows that resort to the British Islands in summer to breed. It is perhaps the most numerous of them all ; next comes the Common Tern, then the Sandwich, followed by the Lesser, and the last and rarest is the Roseate.

These birds are characterised by their long pointed wings and forked tails, which give them a rough resemblance to the barn swallow.

The Arctic Tern is easily distinguished from all its relatives excepting the Common Tern, and as they frequently breed together, and are of about the same size and general appearance, you will need to exercise care in properly identifying them. In each case they are black on the crown of the head and nape of the neck, and pearly grey on the back ; but there is this well-marked distinction between them. The bird under notice has its entire

bill coloured pinky red, whereas that of the Common Tern is pinky red tipped with black.

The Arctic Tern arrives during April or May, and soon resorts to its favourite haunt on some low island, or unfrequented part of the coast to breed. As a rule, it does not make a nest of any kind, simply scratching a slight hollow in the sand or shingle, or selecting some little declivity on a bare piece of rock.

The eggs number two or three and vary in colour from bluish green to brownish buff, spotted and blotched with different shades of brown, and grey.

The chicks are covered with buffish brown coloured down of variable tints, marked with black. They run about soon after they are hatched, and when alarmed squat amongst the stones and shingle and hide, as shown in our illustration.

Where great numbers of Arctic Terns breed together, the chicks mingle in such crowds that it is difficult to understand how the parent birds recognise their own young ones, when they return home with food.

GOLDEN EAGLES.

# The Golden Eagle

IN olden times the Golden Eagle bred as far south as Derbyshire, but the shepherd and the gamekeeper have long since banished it from its haunts in England and Wales, and it is now only found nesting in the wildest and most solitary parts of the Highlands of Scotland, the Hebrides and the west of Ireland, where it is, however, approaching extinction.

It is a grand sight to watch this great bird soaring upon outstretched wings far up in the blue sky. The tips of its flight feathers are bent upwards owing to the heavy weight they have to sustain, and the light can plainly be seen between them, just as old Japanese artists have shown us in their pictures.

The Golden Eagle, although called "the king of birds," is not gifted with the death-dealing fierceness of the peregrine falcon, or the dashing courage of the merlin. It feeds

upon hares, rabbits, grouse, ptarmigan, occasionally lambs, and frequently carrion.

In some Scottish deer forests it is now preserved and encouraged because it keeps down the number of mountain or blue hares. When these animals become too numerous they make deer-stalking very difficult, by running about upon being disturbed by the sportsman, and thus giving warning of danger to the ever alert stags.

The Golden Eagle breeds on ledges in cliffs and occasionally in trees, and is very partial to an old haunt. The eyrie, as the nest is called, is built of sticks, pieces of heather, moss, fern-fronds, grass and occasionally wool. Old eyries are repaired every spring until they become very bulky. The writer has seen one that would have filled the body of an ordinary cart.

Two, and sometimes three, eggs are laid; these are dull white, clouded, blotched, and spotted nearly all over with rusty brown.

Young Eagles grow slowly, and when they have fledged and been taught how to catch their prey, are driven away by their parents, because too many birds of this species could not find food in the same neighbourhood.

COOTS.

# The Common Coot

THIS bird may not inaptly be described as an enlarged edition of the moorhen. Quite apart, however, from this difference in size it can be readily distinguished by the fact that the bare patch or shield on its forehead is pure white, whereas that on the forehead of its relative is red. We frequently hear this species referred to as the "Bald-headed Coot" in consequence of the above-mentioned peculiarity.

The Common Coot frequents lakes, meres, reservoirs, and sluggish rivers, and does not take up its abode, as a rule, upon such small ponds and streams as the moorhen.

It is found breeding in nearly all suitable places throughout the British Islands, migrating during the winter from its frozen haunts to such places as Poole Harbour and Hickling Broad.

Its food consists of worms, slugs, water insects, and different kinds of vegetation.

The nest is made amongst osiers, rushes, reeds, and other aquatic herbage found growing round large bodies of water. It is formed at its base of all kinds of decaying water-plants, for which the bird may sometimes be seen industriously diving, and in its upper parts of dry sedges, flags, reeds, and rushes. The structure is generally built up from the bottom of a shallow part of some lake or mere, but is occasionally only moored to surrounding reeds, from which it is liable to become detached during floods or strong winds and float away. The Coot does not appear to mind this, however, for the writer has seen one calmly sitting on her eggs whilst the nest was drifting hither and thither on a large reservoir.

The eggs number from seven to ten, of a dingy stone colour, spotted all over with brown. They are easily distinguished from those of the moorhen, because of their larger size and the fact that the markings on them are smaller.

The chicks are clothed in black down, some of the tips of which are hairlike and white. They leave the nest directly they are hatched.

NIGHTJARS.

# The Nightjar

THE Nightjar, Goatsucker, or Fern Owl, as this bird is variously known, has its winter quarters in Africa. It arrives in this country during the month of May, and after the breeding season is over, retires in September on its long southward journey.

It is a lover of heather-clad commons and woods with open glades in which plenty of bracken grows, and breeds in suitable localities all over the British Islands.

One cannot understand why it has had the common name of "Goatsucker" bestowed upon it, because the act implied does not count amongst its many curious habits.

It perches differently from all other British birds, for, instead of sitting across a branch, it lies right along it, and as it is very much the colour of the bark of a tree and not quite as long as a missel thrush, it thus frequently escapes notice. Being a bird of the twilight it does not stir by day, but is

very active in the evening in pursuit of moths, beetles, cockchafers and other winged creatures upon which it feeds.

It makes a peculiar "churring" sound at night time—a sound which the young naturalist is never likely to forget once he or she has heard it, and is in consequence known to many country people as the "Churn" Owl. It also utters another note sounding something like "*co-ic, co-ic.*" When disturbed whilst covering its young ones, and especially towards evening, the Fern Owl will fly round making its wings meet with a resounding thwack over its back, or alighting on a stump not far off, will open its great mouth in a way that is plainly meant to be threatening.

This bird does not make a nest, but lays its pair of greyish white eggs, marked with dark brown and leaden grey, on the bare ground.

The young ones are covered with grey down, and if disturbed are shifted by their mother. Whilst crouching on the ground, even in the open, they are sometimes very difficult to see, on account of the colour of the down on their bodies matching that of their surroundings.

CARRION CROWS.

# The Carrion Crow

BOYS and girls who do not know much about the feathered inhabitants of the country frequently mix this bird up in the most hopeless manner with the rook. They call every bird that is black and larger than a jackdaw, a crow. This is quite wrong. Rooks breed in colonies and fly about in flocks, whereas crows nest in isolated pairs and seldom go about in flocks.

The character of the Carrion Crow is almost as black as its plumage. It is a very accomplished egg thief and is in consequence cordially hated by all game-keepers. Farmers also have good reason to dislike it, for it will attack a sickly sheep or lamb with the utmost cruelty.

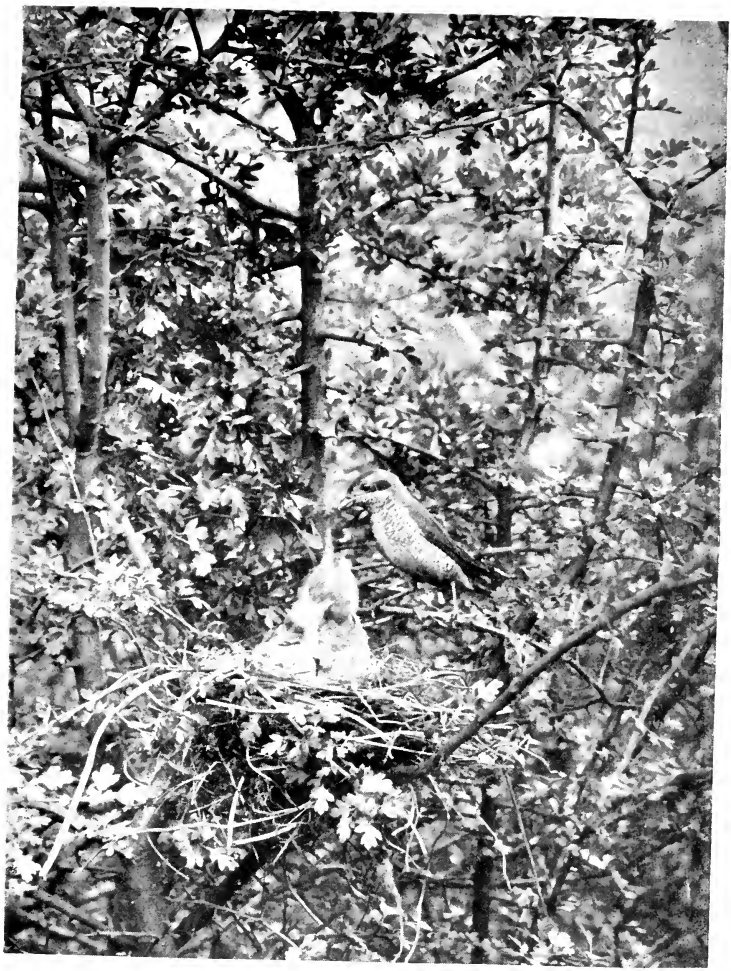
In the winter our native stock of birds of this species is greatly increased by the arrival of migrants from the Continent, many of which do not return, but endea-

vour to establish breeding haunts in places where they are invariably shot by gamekeepers.

The nest is generally built in a tall tree on the edge of a wood, or in some isolated situation affording the bird a good outlook. Sometimes it is placed on a ledge in the face of a precipice, and when the sitting bird is frightened off she very seldom flies straight away, but generally drops straight down for several yards and then takes her departure. Sticks, twigs, mud, and occasionally bits of old rope, form the outside of the nest, which is lined with dead grass, wool, horse-hair or cow's-hair. It is a deep structure, thus preventing the eggs from rolling out when the branches upon which it rests are being violently swayed by the wind.

Four or five greyish green eggs are laid, spotted with smoky brown marks.

The chicks are fed by both parents, and when the mother bird has been shot by a gamekeeper, the writer has known the male go off and secure a stepmother to help him to rear his family.



RED-BACKED SHRIKES.

# The Red-backed Shrike

THE Red-backed Shrike, or Butcher Bird, as it is frequently called, on account of its strange habit of spitting or hanging in thorn bushes the bodies of beetles, mice, and small birds upon which it preys. It is a migrant, arriving in May ; it rears its brood during June or July, and takes its departure again in August and September. Some idea may be gathered of the immense journey made twice a year by this winged traveller, when it is mentioned that the bird spends the winter even as far south as the Cape of Good Hope.

Although nowhere very common, this species breeds generally throughout England, with the exception of the north and west, but is rarely met with in Scotland or Ireland. It loves old chalk pits with thorn and other bushes growing in them, and sunny hillsides where clumps of thorn and bramble grow, but may frequently be met with nesting in thick old hedgerows.

The Butcher Bird appears to be gifted with wonderful eyesight, for whilst seated on a telegraph wire, or the branch of a tree at an equal height, it can detect a beetle in the grass below and swoops down to secure it.

The nest is built in a rough hedge or bush, and is formed of slender twigs, pieces of dead honeysuckle, dry grass stems and moss, lined with wool, hair, or rootlets.

Four or five eggs of a pale buffish white, spotted with reddish brown, are laid. These are subject to considerable variation in ground colour, and the tint and distribution of the markings.

The chicks are hatched in about a fortnight and are fed upon beetles, bees, and all kinds of winged insects. Although the Butcher Bird is only some seven and a half inches in length, it will defend its young ones with great courage, and will not hesitate to attack and drive away larger birds, such as the song thrush, from the neighbourhood of its nest.

On one occasion the writer was struck on the head by a male Red-backed Shrike, in defence of one of its fledglings.

GREAT CRESTED GREBES.

# The Great Crested Grebe

TWO species of Grebes breed in the British Islands. The Lesser Grebe, or Dabchick, and the bird under notice.

The Great Crested Grebe measures about twenty-two inches in length. The facts that its body is long and cone-shaped, and that its legs are placed far back, render it an excellent swimmer, either on the water or under it, but a very poor walker. As a matter of fact the bird does not often try the latter means of locomotion, and when it does so appears very awkward and ungainly. Although its wings are short and small it can fly well.

The Great Crested Grebe inhabits lakes, meres, and large ponds, where reed beds, in in which it can take shelter and breed, grow. Its food consists of small fish, frogs, water beetles and aquatic insects.

The nest is built amongst reeds or bulrushes. Sometimes it is a floating structure

moored to its surroundings, and at others its foundations rest upon the bottom of the lake or mere. It is a kind of rough platform made out of wet flags, reeds, leaves, and different sorts of plants, slightly hollow at the top, and never raised very high above the surface of the water in which it is built.

The number of eggs laid varies from three to five. These are white at first, but soon become stained and dirty, from contact with their owner's feet and the decaying vegetation upon which they rest. On leaving her nest the Great Crested Grebe covers her eggs carefully over with some of the materials of the structure. This serves a twofold purpose. First of all it hides them from any winged enemy, such as the carrion crow, flying overhead, and secondly it keeps them warm.

Baby Grebes begin their education very early. Tumbling over the edge of the nest almost directly after they are hatched, they find their father waiting to teach them how to dive. Mounting his back and seizing some of the feathers at the back of the old bird's neck with their bills, they hold on whilst he plunges below and carries them down with him.

SONG THRUSHES.

# The Song Thrush

THE bright, cheery notes of this familiar bird are better known than, perhaps, those of any other feathered vocalist.

The Song Thrush is common nearly all over the country. In fact, wherever two or three bushes grow together there the bird is almost sure to be found. It sings early and late, and loves to pour forth its wonderful melody from the bare branch of a tall tree. On islands such as those of the Outer Hebrides, where only stunted bushes grow, you may sometimes hear it singing whilst it is perched on the top of a chimney-pot.

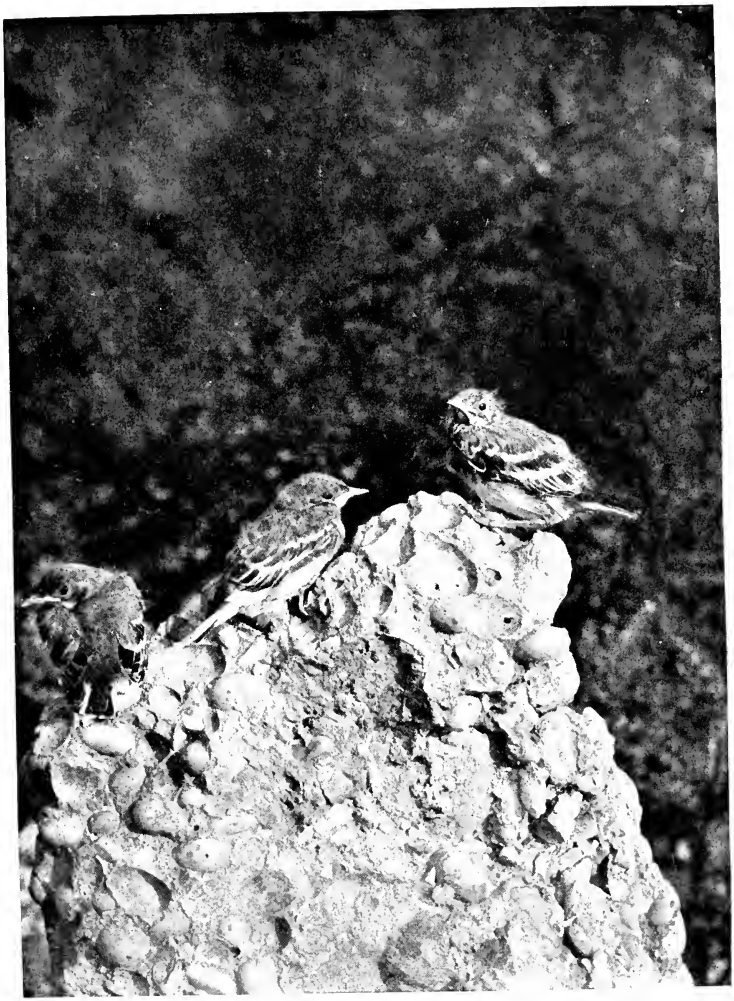
The Song Thrush, or Throstle, as it is called in the north of England, feeds upon snails, worms, and grubs. You may have noticed a collection of broken snail shells lying round a stone in your garden. That is surely the work of a Thrush. If you watch the stone some fine morning you will see the bird hop up to it with a snail in her bill and

hammer it on her anvil, until the shell is broken and she can extract and swallow the fat creature inside.

The nest of this species differs from that of any other British bird. It is made of twigs, dead grass stems, moss and clay and is lined with mud, rotten wood or other material that will dry quite hard. The inside of a well-furnished nest is almost as firm and smooth as that of a wooden bowl.

From four to six beautiful greenish blue eggs are laid. These are generally spotted with black, but occasionally specimens are found without markings of any kind on them. Young Thrushes eat a great quantity of food, and when the weather is cold, and worms and grubs do not care to come to the surface of the ground, the old birds are compelled to work very hard in order to find them their meals.

If you watch a nest containing a family of fledglings from some place of concealment, you will see the chicks standing one after another on the edge of the structure, flapping their little wings, as if to test their strength before venturing to fly away.



PIED WAGTAILS.

# The Pied Wagtail

THIS bird has had a most suitable common name given to it, because it is black and white and is always wagging its long tail. Why it does so nobody can tell. It does not matter whether the bird is angry or pleased, happy or unhappy, its tail is always going up and down, up and down.

The Pied Wagtail usually haunts the edges of ponds and the banks of streams, but may frequently be found breeding far away from water of any kind.

It lives upon flies and all kinds of insects. During almost any fine day it may be seen tripping daintily along a road, across a lawn or by the side of a river, picking up flies at rest, or fluttering a few feet into the air, in order to catch one on the wing.

This species makes its nest of dead grass and rootlets, and lines it with horsehair, feathers, cowhair, or rabbit's down. It is generally well hidden in a hole, in an old

wall, amongst ivy, in a cleft of rock, or under an overhanging tuft of grass growing on a ledge.

The eggs number from four to six, and are greyish white, thickly speckled with brownish grey markings.

Baby Wagtails, like the chicks of many other species, learn wisdom very quickly. You may visit them in the nest every day, and up to a certain period they will eagerly lift their heads and open their mouths in request of food. But one morning when you go to see them a great change has taken place in their behaviour, for, instead of lifting their heads, they all crouch low in the nest and keep quite still. "Ah," you say, "they have got their eyes open and can see that I am a human being and not a bird."

No, that is not it. Young birds frequently appear to welcome a human visitor to the nest when their eyes are quite wide open, but there comes a time when they suddenly realise danger, and they entirely alter their attitude towards you.

Young "Dish-Washers," as these birds are frequently called, may often be observed trying to wag their wee short tails, even before they have left the nest.

TREE PIPIT.

# The Tree Pipit

UNLIKE the Meadow Pipit or Titlark this bird is migratory, leaving us in September or October and returning again in April. It is about six inches in length, of a sandy-brown colour above streaked with dark brown, and light buff on the breast, which is marked with dark brown streaks. The young naturalist is not likely to confuse it with the skylark, because it is smaller than that bird and does not raise the feathers on the crown of its head in the form of a crest.

It is somewhat like its relatives the Meadow Pipit and the Rock Pipit in appearance, but does not, as a rule, inhabit the kind of country frequented by those two species.

The Tree Pipit's haunts are to be found in grassy glades where trees grow in clumps, and on the edges of plantations, woods, and spinneys. It is fond of rising from the top-

most branch of some favourite tree or bush in order to utter its shrill canary-like song, the greater part of which is delivered whilst the bird is gliding downwards again with outspread wings and tail, and legs dangling below its body. It also frequently sings whilst seated on its favourite perch. The call-note sounds something like "*trit, trit,*" or "*t'sip, t'sip.*"

The food of this species consists of insects of all kinds, and the writer has seen a female leave her nest in order to catch a small snail, whilst it was climbing a grass stem a foot or two away.

The nest is made in the shelter of a tuft of grass, and is composed of rootlets and moss with an inner lining of fine dead grass and hair.

From four to six eggs are laid of very variable coloration. Some are greyish white tinged with purple and marked with purple, brown, and red spots, whilst others are dull white with dark brown markings.

The chicks are fed by both parent birds, and when they leave the nest soon learn to secure their own food.

GOLDEN PLOVER.

# The Golden Plover

THIS is perhaps the most beautiful member of all the Plover family, and has no doubt received its common name from the golden buff or yellowish markings on the plumage of its upper parts.

The Golden Plover is a frequenter, during the summer months, of desolate wastes and solitary moors in the highest and wildest parts of the west and north of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Its plaintive call-note can be heard at a great distance and sounds something like "*tlui.*" When the female is sitting on the eggs the male is nearly always doing sentry duty on the top of some knoll commanding a good view of the surrounding landscape. At the first sign of approaching danger he gives a warning cry, and his mate slips off the nest, runs for some distance, and joining him, both try their best, and frequently with success, to decoy the intruder away.

The food of this species consists of worms, slugs, grubs, beetles, and all kinds of insects.

The nest is made amongst coarse grass, fringe moss, or short heather. It is a neat cup-shaped hollow, lined with small blades of dead grass, rushes, or slender stalks of heather.

Four pear-shaped eggs somewhat larger than those of the lapwing are laid. They are yellowish stone, or cream colour, marked with blackish brown spots.

The baby birds are covered with a beautiful coat of golden-coloured down, marked with black and greyish white. They run about as soon as they are hatched, and are brooded and looked after by the male as well as the female.

When the breeding season is over the birds gather together in large flocks, and leaving the high moors, migrate to lower country, where they spend their time in fallow fields and pastures or on mudflats by the seashore. They frequently fly by night, and in consequence are sometimes killed by coming in contact with telegraph wires.

SHORT-EARED OWL.

# The Short-eared Owl

THE Short-eared Owl is a very widely distributed bird, being found all over Europe, the greater part of Asia, in northern Africa, and throughout the whole length of the American continent at one season or other of the year.

Although a somewhat rare breeding species in the British Islands, its numbers are considerably swollen in the winter by migrants from more northern countries. It arrives on the east coast about the same time in October as the woodcock, and whether it is from this circumstance, or the fact that it indulges in a similar twisting flight, is not quite certain, but in many parts it is known as the "Woodcock Owl."

Its head is somewhat smaller and more hawk-like than that of any other member of the owl family inhabiting our country. The ear tufts consist of three or four feathers which can be erected or lowered at will.

They are only about half the length of those of the Long-eared Owl.

It feeds upon voles, mice, small birds and beetles, for which it frequently hunts in the broad light of day, and does not appear to be inconvenienced even by sunlight. During the last plague of voles in the Lowlands of Scotland, Short-eared Owls arrived upon the scene in great numbers and helped the farmers to reduce the vast army of their four-footed enemies.

The nest is made on the ground amongst heather, rushes, gorse or sedge, on moors, and in fens and marshes. It is a mere hollow, sometimes lined with a few bits of dead grass or moss, and at others entirely bare.

The eggs generally number from three to five, although as many as seven or eight may be found where the natural food of the species is very plentiful. They are white and oval in shape.

As in the case of other owls, the young ones in a clutch vary considerably in size. They leave the nest before they are able to fly, especially if disturbed, and, creeping through the heather or rushes, hide and wait until their food is brought to them.

WIDGEON.

# The Widgeon

ALTHOUGH this beautiful duck is very abundant on our coast and inland lakes during the autumn and spring, few pairs stay to breed with us, and those generally in the extreme north of Scotland and the Orkney and Shetland Islands. Its real home is in the Arctic regions, where it nests commonly from Iceland to Eastern Siberia.

Once you have heard the Widgeon's shrill double call-note, you are never likely to forget it. It consists of a long musical un-duck-like whistle, followed by a short low one, and sounds like "*mee-yu.*" If you should hear it for the first time whilst you are alone in the dark, near some solitary sheet of water, you will no doubt think it a very wild and weird cry.

Unlike many other members of the duck family, this bird feeds by day instead of by night. Its principal food is grass, and apparently in recognition of this fact the

Laplanders call it by a name signifying the "Grass Duck."

By the end of June or the beginning of July the male Widgeon has undergone a great change in his appearance. He has dropped his wedding garments, so to speak, and donned a darker and more soberly coloured dress, which makes him resemble to a greater extent his mate in her coat of dark and reddish brown feathers.

The nest of the Widgeon is made on the ground amongst heather, rushes, coarse tall grass, flags, reeds, and under small bushes. It consists of dead rushes, reeds, leaves, and dry grass, with an inner lining of down plucked from the breast of the female. This down is carefully folded over the eggs whenever the bird leaves her nest of her own accord.

The eggs number seven or eight and are creamy white in colour.

Like other members of the family to which they belong the ducklings are covered with down, and leave the nest directly they are hatched and take to the water in charge of their mother.

COMMON BUZZARDS.

# The Common Buzzard

THE Common Buzzard is a large ashy brown coloured bird of the falcon family. It inhabits wooded districts in the west and north of England, Wales, and Scotland, being most numerous where no game preserving is carried on amongst the mountains of the Principality. A few years ago it bred in the north of Ireland, but there is every reason to fear that the game-keeper has banished it, as he has effectually done from many parts of England and Scotland. This is a pity, because the bird is very useful to the farmer, does little harm to game, and is a great addition to the wild picturesqueness of a mountain landscape.

It does not exhibit the fierce dashing habits of many members of the family to which it belongs, and instead of pursuing birds on the wing prefers to prey upon leverets, rabbits, rats, voles, mice, wounded

birds, frogs, snakes, and slow-worms, which are more easily overtaken and caught. After feeding it will sit motionless for hours on some jutting crag in the face of a cliff, or on the branch of a tree. When on the wing it has a habit of sailing round and round in majestic circles, at a great height, and uttering its plaintive catlike mewing cry.

It makes its nest of sticks and twigs, frequently lining it with green leaves, or bits of wool. The structure is placed in the fork or on the horizontal branch of a tree and sometimes on a ledge in the face of a cliff. Occasionally the old nest of a carrion crow is utilised.

The eggs number from two to four and are variable in colour. Some specimens are dingy white and without spots, whilst others are greenish or bluish white, spotted, blotched and streaked with reddish brown.

The chicks are covered with beautiful white down when hatched. They leave the nest before they can fly very far, and even when they are strong on the wing follow their parents about for some time after fledging.

BLACK-HEADED GULLS.

# The Black-headed Gull

THIS is perhaps the best known of all our sea-gulls. The facts that it nearly always breeds inland, and visits our harbours and tidal rivers in great numbers during the winter months, give nearly everybody an ample opportunity of studying it during some periods of the year. In the severe winter of 1895 numbers of these birds found their way up the river Thames into the very heart of London, and were so well treated by interested spectators, who fed them upon scraps of fish, shrimps, biscuits, and bits of bread and cheese, that they have visited the metropolis regularly ever since.

The black or, to be more accurate, dark brown hood from which the bird has received its common name, is only a breeding season decoration. In the winter the head is white, except for a tinge of grey at the back and a darkish grey patch behind the feathers that cover the ear.

Throughout the greater part of the year the Black-headed Gull feeds upon worms, slugs, and grubs picked up in ploughed fields and pastures.

As a rule, it nests in colonies, but occasionally a solitary pair may be found breeding on the edge of some moorland tarn. Swamps and bogs near to inland lakes, also small islands in bodies of fresh water, are its favourite breeding haunts: but at Ravenglass, in Cumberland, a vast number of Black-headed Gulls rear their young year by year on sandhills near the sea. A curious fact in regard to this matter is that the birds at Ravenglass all appear to fly inland in search of food for their offspring.

The nest is made of sedges, rushes, reeds, and dead grass, and the eggs, generally numbering two or three, are pale olive brown to light umber brown in colour, spotted and streaked with blackish brown and dark grey.

The young ones are clothed in down and begin to run about and swim soon after they have been hatched.

SWALLOWS.

# The Swallow

THIS familiar bird is frequently referred to as the Barn or Chimney Swallow, on account of its habit of building inside barns and the chimneys of old houses. You will have no difficulty in distinguishing it from either the swift, house martin, or sand martin if you remember that it has a much longer tail than any of these birds, and that it is divided in the middle, like the prongs of a fork.

The Swallow is a migratory bird, arriving from its winter abode in Africa, towards the end of March or beginning of April, if the weather should be mild and sunny, and departing again in September.

It feeds upon flies which are caught upon the wing, and if you are near enough you can sometimes hear the snap of the bird's bill as it closes upon an insect.

All bird-lovers delight in watching the Swallow's graceful flight, as it circles high in

air, or sweeps in long swift curves over meadow and stream.

The song is a joyous warble, uttered whilst the bird is flashing through the air at lightning speed, or sitting at rest on a house-top or the branch of a tree.

Its nest is constructed of mud intermixed with straws, and lined with nice soft feathers, and is placed on beams and rafters, inside stables, barns, and sheds, or as already mentioned, down the inside of a chimney.

The eggs generally number four or five, although as many as six may sometimes be found in a clutch. They are white marked with dark reddish-brown and ashy-grey spots.

Young Swallows are fed by both parent birds, and when they fledge, it is an interesting sight to watch them sitting on the roof of a barn waiting for food, or accompanying the old birds in little excursions over the fields. During these trial flights they are frequently fed in mid-air.

A few days before Swallows take their departure for the winter, you may generally see them congregated in flocks on the roofs of houses, or telegraph wires, in the early morning.

STOCK DOVES.

# The Stock Dove

THE nature student is not likely to confuse this bird with its relatives the ring dove, or the rock dove, if the following simple facts are remembered. The ring dove has a little patch of glossy white on either side of its neck, and the rock dove a large one on the lower part of its back, whereas the Stock Dove has none.

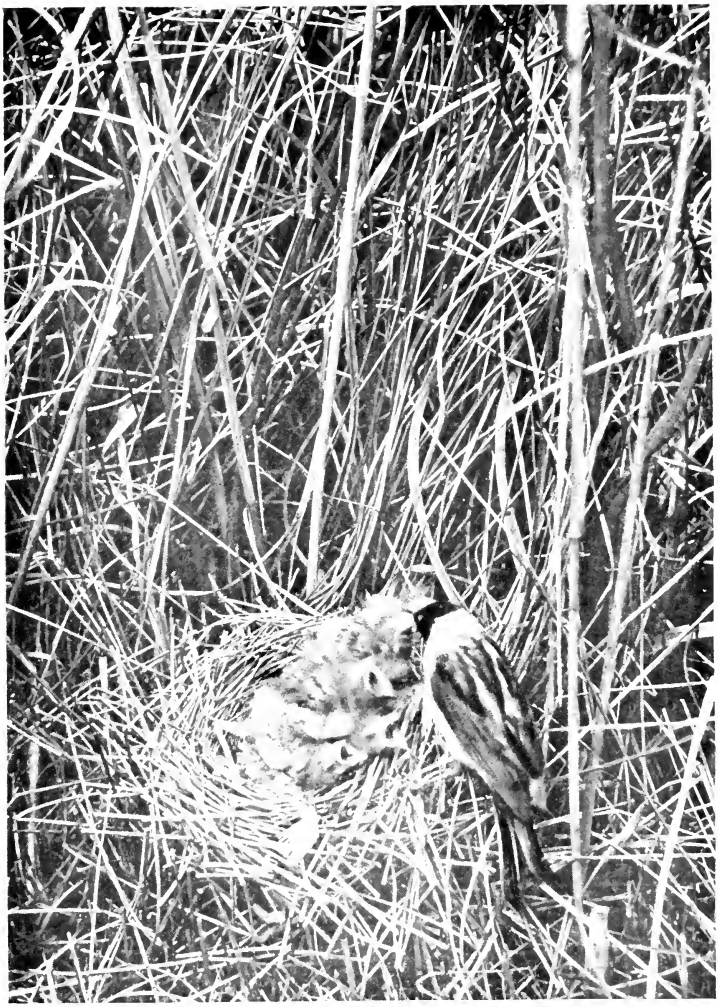
The Stock Dove is found in most parts of England from the well-wooded districts of the south, to the lonely valleys in Westmorland and Cumberland, is extending its breeding area in Scotland, and is found in many parts of Ireland. The writer discovered a pair nesting in a disused rabbits' burrow in the Outer Hebrides some years ago.

It was thought at one time that all our different varieties of domestic pigeons had been bred from the Stock Dove, but this is not so, as the rock dove is the real parent of all tame pigeons.

The peculiar nesting habits of the species under notice have bestowed upon it in Germany the very suitable common name of "Hole Dove." It breeds in hollow trees and seems partial to oaks, elms, and pollard willows growing on the banks of small streams and rivers. Frequently it takes possession of disused rabbits' burrows situated far away from trees of any kind, and in olden times dogs were employed in Norfolk in order to find young doves in the extensive warrens which are a feature of some parts of that county. Crevices and holes in inland cliffs are favourite nesting-places, but if neither hollow trees nor precipices should be available, the Stock Dove readily turns to account the old home of a carrion crow or magpie. Occasionally it is found nesting in a ruin or old stone barn.

Twigs, rootlets, and straws are used in a careless way as building material, and frequently the bird dispenses with them altogether and deposits its two white eggs on decaying wood, when making use of a hollow tree.

The young ones do not leave the nest until they are fully feathered.



REED BUNTINGS.

# The Reed Bunting

THE Reed Bunting, or Reed Sparrow, is sometimes called the Black-headed Bunting. This a mistake, for in spite of the fact that the male has a velvety black head the name really belongs to a different species altogether. You are not at all likely to confuse the two birds, because the Black-headed Bunting is a very rare visitor to our shores, and when you see a feathered friend a trifle longer than a house sparrow with a black head and a white collar round its neck, you are fairly safe in concluding that you are looking at a male Reed Bunting.

This species frequents marshes, swamps, the banks of sluggish rivers, and the margins of lakes and reservoirs all over the British Islands. The writer has met with it breeding on small heather-clad islands in the Outer Hebrides, and at a great elevation on Norwegian mountains, where there were plenty of snowdrifts and no reeds.

It feeds principally upon insects in the summer, catching and killing even the largest species of dragon-flies, and in the winter roams, over stubble fields and waste lands, in search of grain and seeds.

The Reed Sparrow is not a very accomplished musician, but repeats his few simple notes with wonderful persistency.

The nest is generally built, on or near the ground, amongst rushes, coarse grass, heather, or in a stunted bush. It is made of dry grass and moss, with an inner lining of fine dead grass, hair, and the feathery tops of reed stems.

Five eggs are generally laid, although as many as seven have been found in a clutch. They are pale olive or purplish grey in ground colour, spotted and streaked with rich, dark, purple brown markings. The eggs are smaller than those laid by any bunting breeding in our country, and are thus easily distinguished from those of the yellow-hammer and corn-bunting.

The male sits on the eggs whilst the female is away searching for food, and helps to feed the chicks after they have been hatched.

DIPPER.

# The Dipper

THE Dipper, or Water Ouzel, as it is sometimes called, is one of the most interesting birds to be found in our country. It is not quite so large as a song thrush, and is shaped somewhat like a wren. Its head, and upper parts generally, are black, breast snowy white, and underside chestnut.

If you did not know you would never guess from the bird's appearance how it obtained its food. Without webbed feet or any other advantage of structure not possessed by a blackbird, the Dipper goes under water in search of the insects that form its food. In olden days it was thought that the bird could literally walk along the bottom of a stream, but this is not so. Upon going under water it uses its wings, as it does when in flight, but, of course, its rate of progression is much slower.

The Water Ouzel is by no means a

sociable bird, and you never see more than two together unless it be in the breeding season, when you may come upon a family. A pair of these birds will take possession of a stretch of river or stream, preferably one with plenty of cascades and mossy boulders in it, and allow no other members of their species to intrude. If you try to drive a Dipper away from its own part of a stream you cannot do so, for as soon as the bird has reached the boundary line of its particular beat, it will fly round you and return.

The song of this species is exceedingly sweet, but pitched so low that it cannot be heard to advantage, unless the listener is very close to the singer.

The nest is built in crevices of rock, in holes in stone bridges, on mossy boulders, and even behind waterfalls. It is a large structure, made of moss, and lined with fine dead grass and leaves. In shape it is not unlike that of the wren. The eggs are white and number four to six.

Young Dippers have no white on the breast, and their plumage is a mixture of black, brown, and grey.

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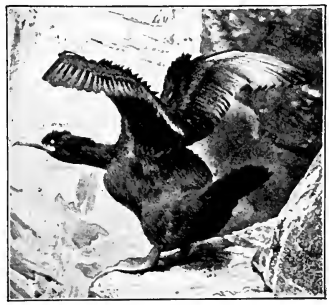

*Shag stretching herself.*
(*From* Wild Life at Home)

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*Cock Sparrow ready for Dinner*
(*From* Our Bird Friends)

*The Nest of Mrs. Missel Thrush*
(*From* Strange Adventures in Dicky-Bird Land)

*Humble Bee*
(*From* The Fairy-Land of Living Things)

(*See previous page*)

*Domestic Mouse*

(*From* Natural History of Selborne)

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